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TWO YEARS

AT

HILLSBORO'.

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JULIA NELSON.

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TO

MY DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER,

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PREFACE.

THE writer is fully aware of the many defects in this her first book, but if the readers of "Two Years at Hillsboro'" will kindly pardon all mistakes, however glaring they may be, she will feel deeply indebted to them.

As it may make the book more interesting to the majority of its readers, the writer will also say that a few of the characters are real, living, breathing beings, and that some of the incidents recorded therein actually happened: the "Eastern Trip" being a *fac-simile* of one that the writer took, and the description of the night spent at the Vermont Hotel, however absurd and improbable it may appear, is not in the least exaggerated.

JULIA NELSON.

CONTENTS.

Chapter		Page
I.	The School	9
II.	Its Inmates	22
III.	A Surprise	43
IV.	Sunday	55
V.	A Benevolent Society	64
VI.	Sabrina Smith	75
VII.	Merry Christmas	90
VIII.	New-Year's Calls	107
IX.	Poor Nell	114
X.	Vacation	126
XI.	Mabel goes Visiting	133
XII.	An Adventure	144
XIII.	Joy Once More	155
XIV.	The Merry Picnickers	169
XV.	The Return to School	192
XVI.	Iolanthe as a Heroine	200
XVII.	St. Valentine	217
XVIII.	Commencement	227
XIX.	One Year After	241
XX.	An Eastern Trip	263
XXI.	A Wedding	282

GOOD FELLOWS' LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
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TWO YEARS AT HILLSBORO'.

CHAPTER I.

THE SCHOOL.

"GOOD-BY, all! good-by! I will write as soon as I get there, mamma, and be sure you answer right away, and a long, long letter."

"I will, dear, be sure of that."

"Good-by, papa! Don't forget me pegging away at my books, as Ed says, and trying to make an accomplished young lady of myself."

"To be sure, I shall not forget my little bandage-maker," answered Dr. Stewart, making an effort to appear gay, while a suspicious moisture gathered in his eyes at the thought of parting with his eldest daughter for seven long months.

"I say, Mab," shouted a boyish voice, belonging to a ten-year-old specimen of Young America, "don't come back so stuck up that you can't play ball with a fellow any more."

"Never fear, Ed; I'll come back the same Mabel that went away."

"One more kiss; just one more," clamored a sunny-tressed, shrill-voiced child of eight, trying to jump up and catch hold of the window through which Mabel's face looked.

Her father lifted her in his arms, and throwing her own childish ones around her sister's neck, she hugged her until that young lady fairly gasped for breath.

"Good-by, my own dear Mabel! Don't forget you are to write me a nice, long letter, all by myself, and direct it to Miss Lilian Ashbury Stewart, and don't love anybody better than you do me."

"I'll remember, Lilly darling, and I couldn't love any one better than you."

"All right now; you be sure." And, with another hug and kiss, the child loosed her hold of Mabel, but caught hold of the other window, by which her tall, handsome brother was sitting, and thrusting her bright head through, she cried, "Here's one for you, Guy, to remember me by."

"You are quite a youthful poetess, Lil," said Guy, smiling, as he gave her a parting embrace.

Here the engine-bell began to ring, and Mrs. Stewart hastily pulled Lilly away.

"Good-by, my dears," she said, giving a hand to each of her children as the train began to move

slowly. "Close your window, Mabel, before you take cold, and once more, good-by."

"I will. Good-by."

This last was but faintly heard by the tearful group on the platform, for Mabel's window had gone down, but there was a great fluttering of handkerchiefs and throwing of kisses until the two young travellers had disappeared from sight.

Of course, as we are to become intimately acquainted with Mabel, we will want to know what she is like and where she is going. Let us look at her now as she sits gazing out of the car-window, trying resolutely to put away all thoughts of those she had left lest she should be tempted to turn back. A slender, well-proportioned figure, lithe and straight, somewhat awkward just at present, it must be confessed, but a term at a fashionable seminary, to which she is going, will suffice to dispel all that. A sweet, expressive face, oval in contour, with a clear, fresh complexion, a red, rather wide mouth, great, earnest eyes of deep, dark blue, so dark sometimes as to be almost black, and the whole crowned by a wealth of silky hair of pure, sunny gold. She is now on her way, escorted by her brother,—who is also on his way to D—— College,—to Hillsboro', to spend her first term at boarding-school. Perhaps you will wonder at her going so far to school when there are others nearer home that she could

attend. One of the reasons was that Mrs. Stewart went there in her youth, and so had a partiality for that particular place. Then the circular that Mrs. Barrett, the principal, had sent them announced that the seminary was the great popular centre for scholars from all points of the compass, and was extensively patronized. It employed one of the best corps of teachers, and its musical department was unrivalled in the United States. The third, and perhaps the most important reason, in her own opinion, was that Mabel, who had always had a passion for boarding-schools, declared that if she went at all she wanted to go way off somewhere like girls in story-books, and so it was decided. "All applications for rooms must be in by the third of November" read the circular, so Mabel, thinking it would be all right, did not write to announce her coming, but started so as to arrive at Hillsboro' on the third. We will not go into all the details of the journey from St. Louis. Suffice it to say that the next morning Guy and Mabel alighted at Lowe-land, where they were to wait one hour for the train that was to convey them to their destination.

Snow had fallen the night before, so that it was rather bad walking; but, nevertheless, after seeing that their baggage was safely checked, our two travellers took a walk about town. It was a dull, prosy little place, that seemed as if it had gone

to sleep beneath the bleak November sky. Nothing interesting met their view, and, after buying some candy and oranges at a little corner grocery, Guy and Mabel returned to the depot.

Mabel was already beginning to feel a little homesick, and felt greatly relieved when the train at last came puffing up and they were once more on their way. There were several passengers for Hillsboro', but none of them seemed to be going to the seminary. There was only one hack in view, and that was labelled —— Hotel; and as they stood on the platform of the little station and saw the train steam rapidly away, Mabel looked at her brother in bewilderment. "I thought there would be a conveyance here," she said.

"It seems that they were not expecting any pupils on this train," answered Guy.

"It seems so; but what shall we do? We can't walk to the seminary in all this snow, and, besides, we don't know where it is."

"I'll speak to that hackman about taking us; you wait here." And Guy darted away. He came back with the word that the man would come for them in about half an hour. "He says the train for L—— is due here at ——," continued Guy; "so I will not have any more time than I need, after I leave you, in which to get back to the station."

"Do you really have to go back right away?"

asked Mabel, stifling a sigh that would come. "Can't you possibly wait until the next train?"

"No, my dear sister," answered Guy; "I would love to stay with you longer, but the next train for L—— does not pass here until to-morrow morning, and that will be too late. And you know, Doll, how strict the rules of D—— are about a fellow's being there on time."

"I know," responded Mabel; "and the longer I put off the last minute the worse it will be. Just think of me all alone in a school full of strangers. I shall almost die of homesickness."

"Oh, no, not quite," said her brother, cheerfully; "I venture to say that you will not be an entire stranger by night."

"Oh, poor me!" cried Mabel, the word night striking terror to her heart; "I almost wish I had stayed at home. Think how awkward I shall feel rooming with a girl I never saw before! But perhaps they will put me in a room by myself, and then I shall be afraid. Oh, dear! all the romance is taken out of boarding-school for me."

"Now, Mab, where is the brave girl that started from home yesterday morning? You must not allow yourself to think this way, and I am sure that you will find yourself grandly mistaken about feeling strange and awkward. You know one schoolgirl is not slow to make friends with another, and I doubt not that you will have several acquaint-

ances, if not real friends, before you retire to-night. You like to watch people, too, and you will have a good opportunity while at dinner to-day."

"But I won't enjoy any of it, for I shall be terribly homesick," persisted Mabel.

"I am not afraid that you will. Everything will be new; and, besides, it is not as if you were to be all alone."

"Well, I'll try my best," said Mabel, resolutely, "and I'll write a letter to you this evening and tell you how I succeed."

"Good for you!" exclaimed Guy; "I know it will be full of a glorious triumph. But I see our hack coming at the upper end of that street there, so put on your brightest smiles, and you will come out with flying colors."

"I'm not so sure," Mabel thought, but she said nothing, and the hack was soon drawn up by the platform.

The ride to the seminary was a short one, but it seemed a long time to Mabel before they stopped in front of a high arched gate. She looked out with an eager, anxious face. A long, wide building, three stories high, enclosed by a picket-fence, was the seminary. Directly opposite to its side, but separated from it by a common, was the college, a similar but more imposing structure.

As Guy and Mabel passed under the arch, which Guy called the triumphal entry, the front door of the seminary opened, and a girl, with a large, well-developed figure, came out. She was clad in a dress of some rich material, with a seal-skin sacque and cap. She had a dark, sparkling face, and large, brilliant eyes.

There was time for nothing more than a glance as she hurried by them, but Mabel, with all the impulsiveness of youth, fell in love with her at once.

Guy was too well bred to look after her, but he instantly wished he was going to boarding-school at Hillsboro' too.

"Isn't she sweet?" said Mabel, as they stepped upon the porch, and turned around to watch the stranger, and to their surprise found her seated in the hack they had just vacated.

A chorus of voices came from a window above.

"Oh! oh! you awful girl! Aren't you ashamed to do such a dreadful thing?"

The occupant of the cab quietly lowered her window, and said in a voice that, had you not seen its possessor, you would have declared belonged to a dusky inhabitant of the South,—

"Not at all. Shame was left out of my vocabulary. I believe in the maxim 'Do not let your chances like sunbeams pass you by,' and as you all know, girls, that our hack-rides are like angels'

visits, I thought I would not let my stray sunbeam escape, and so forth. Au 'revolver' until we meet again."

This last called forth a burst of laughter from her unseen auditors, and the carriage rolled away.

"Wasn't she cute?" asked Mabel, as Guy pulled the bell-knob, causing a harsh jangle to resound through the hall. "I wonder who she is? I know I shall like her, for she is just too lovely."

"She is one of the handsomest girls I ever saw," responded Guy, with warmth. "When you write, Mab, you must tell me her name."

Mabel had just time to answer that she would, when the door was opened by a pleasant-faced native of the Emerald Isle. As she saw Guy her face took on a look of consternation, but when her eyes fell on Mabel it cleared immediately, and she motioned for them to enter. The hall was long and wide. Doors opened on either side, and one at the end, which was labelled "Dining-Room." Mabel noticed that the other doors also bore placards, such as "Principal's Parlor," "Parlor," "Recitation-Room," "Music-Room," "Gymnasium," and so on.

Their conductress ushered the brother and sister into the "Parlor," with the remark to Guy, "Shure, sir, when I saw you, I thought it was the college you wanted, and had blundered in

here. No jintlemen are allowed here, and I was relaved to see the young lady."

She pushed forward a small, stiff rocking-chair for Mabel, and then left them alone. With that natural curiosity inherited by her sex, Mabel gazed around the apartment. It was not very large, and had a most unhomelike air. The carpet was a Brussels, and had once been a bright green and buff, but it was now so faded that its manufacturer would have had hard work to recognize it. The furniture was small, stiff-backed, and spindle-legged. A table by one of the windows contained a few books, but one glance at their titles proved enough for Mabel. She did not venture to open them.

The high wooden mantel held two blue china vases, an ornamental match-safe, and a round-faced clock. The paper on the walls was very dark, and that, with the brown window-curtains, helped to throw a gloom over everything. A small fire struggled feebly to maintain its life in the grate.

The uncompromising aspect of the whole room struck a chill to Mabel's heart. If all the rooms were as cheerless and forbidding as this one, her homesickness was more likely to be augmented than dispelled.

Just at this juncture her thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of a slender, graceful lady,

bearing unmistakably the stamp of a foreigner in her face and manner.

Guy rose as she entered, and asked,—

"Is this Mrs. Barrett?"

"No, monsieur," she answered, with a slight French accent, "Mrs. Barrett is not in at present. I am Miss Metz, the French teacher."

In as few words as possible Guy then stated their errand to her. With a face of mingled surprise and consternation Miss Metz listened, and when he was through she exclaimed,—

"But you sent no word; you made no application."

"We consider this as an application," answered Guy.

"But you should have written," went on Miss Metz, "and all letters must be in *before* the third. That is what the circular means."

Guy and Mabel looked at each other, at a loss for a few minutes what to do or say.

"Then we misunderstood," said the young man. "We thought it meant application either by letter or in person, and that it would be all right if we arrived here on the third. But if the rooms are all engaged, of course my sister will have to return home."

"No! no!" cried Miss Metz, quickly, "she must not do that. There are one or two rooms not engaged; but if they were, I would take her

with me rather than have her go back. Would you like to look at the rooms, monsieur?"

"I will just have time to get back to the station," answered Guy, consulting his watch. "I would like to stay and look at them with my sister, but I must be at my own college by to-morrow."

"But you cannot walk to the station," said Miss Metz, "and you have no conveyance. I will order the seminary hack brought around for you right away." And she left the room.

Left alone, Guy took this opportunity to bid his sister farewell.

"Do you suppose there is any room for me?" she asked; "perhaps I had better go home, after all."

"No, indeed. You know it's bad luck to go back; and, besides, she would not ask you to look at engaged rooms," answered her brother. "I assure you it will be all right, Mabel dear. I would not leave you here if I thought it wasn't. There is the hack now, and here comes Miss Metz again, and I must say good-by for sure this time."

He folded Mabel in a close, brotherly embrace, pressed a last kiss on the quivering lips, and then, not daring to trust himself longer, hurried from the room and sprang into the hack which had just driven up.

Mabel did not cry, but she felt her heart sink within her as she stood at the window and watched

the carriage containing her brother drive rapidly down the road. It seemed as if the last visible link binding her to home had been broken, and she felt too wretched for tears.

"Now, Miss Stewart," said Miss Metz's voice at her side, "we will look at the rooms."

Mabel turned away from the window with a sigh and followed Miss Metz, who, thinking to divert the young girl's mind from her recent parting with her brother, showed her the various rooms opening from the lower hall. Then she led the way up-stairs.

CHAPTER II.

ITS INMATES.

As they reached the upper hall, the girl Mabel had met at the seminary gate rushed past them with her arms full of bundles, and with a bow to Miss Metz disappeared into one of the rooms. Mabel could not help looking admiringly back, and as the door closed behind her Miss Metz said, "That is Bess Grahame, the most popular girl in the school, and the acknowledged leader in all kinds of mischief. The girls call her the 'Grahame Gem.' Her father is a noted Congregational minister."

They ascended a second flight of stairs, and stopping before the last room in the hall, Miss Metz opened the door and they entered. The room was small, but cosey. A bed, washstand, two chairs, and a table was all the furniture it contained. The walls were plain, white, and devoid of ornament, and a brown muslin curtain shaded the window. Strips of matting were laid down before the bed and grate. A fire was burning cheerily in the latter, and Miss Metz stopped short in surprise at sight of it.

"Why, what——" she began, but she was interrupted by a cool voice from the door-way: "May I ask what you are doing in my room?"

Turning, the intruders beheld a tall, perfectly formed young lady, with a handsome, haughty face, looking at them from the door.

"May I ask when it became your room, Miss Amy Grahame?" asked Miss Metz, somewhat sharply.

"This morning," was the answer. "Miss Wilson and I engaged it of Mrs. Barrett, and as more than two cannot possibly——"

"That will be quite sufficient, Miss Grahame. You will please excuse the intrusion. Had I known that this room was yours I should not have attempted to enter it. Come, Miss Stewart." And followed by Mabel the teacher left the room.

Miss Grahame looked after them, a scornful smile curling her scarlet lips, and then closing her door, she turned the key so sharply as to be heard by the retreating figures.

"I will take you to my room," Miss Metz said, as they descended to the first floor again, "and if I am unsuccessful a second time, I will refer you to Mrs. Barrett when she comes. She was obliged to go to Hillsboro' on private business, and will not be back until noon." So, after leaving Mabel comfortably seated by her own cosey fire, Miss Metz departed. It was fully twenty minutes be-

fore she came again with a more disconsolate face than ever.

"It is of no use," she said, "we will have to wait until Mrs. Barrett comes; and meanwhile you may bathe your face and hands and freshen yourself up, for you look tired and dusty enough after your long journey." And she produced fresh towels, brush, and comb.

It took but a few moments to "freshen up," and Mabel emerged from her toilet looking and feeling brighter than she had since she left home the morning before. Miss Metz then gave her a book to read, and promising to come for her when Mrs. Barrett arrived, excused herself on the plea of business and made her exit.

Left alone, the book lay closed on Mabel's lap, her hands clasped over it, and I am not sure that two bright tears did not dim a pair of blue eyes, and that a little homesick heart did not falter and almost decide to go back after all. But a strong will came to the rescue, and a resolute "I won't" made the poor heart tremble, but only for a moment, for a picture of home and the dear ones there rose before her mental vision, and it was a very timid "won't" that interposed, and I don't know what might have happened had not a loud clanging come suddenly from the hall, and almost simultaneously the door opened to admit Mrs. Barrett. She was a tall, portly woman,

with a fine, intelligent face, and a commanding air about her that won dislike as well as respect for its owner. Mabel rose at her entrance, and the lady said, "I presume this is the young lady Miss Metz spoke of to me?"

Her speech and manner, though polite, were abrupt and somewhat patronizing, and Mabel's impression of the principal was anything but favorable. She began to repent already of having come at all, and the longing for home grew stronger than ever. An awkward silence ensued, and all the while Mrs. Barrett's eyes seemed to pierce her very soul. It was fully two minutes before Mabel recovered herself sufficiently to answer "Yes, ma'am," bowing as she did so, partly to conceal the confusion which she knew her face portrayed.

But the keen glance penetrated farther than she thought, and Mrs. Barrett's next words were in a different tone: "I am sorry you were so unfortunate; but I presume you were not aware that our rooms are always engaged before the term opens."

"Papa thought I would be in ample time," began Mabel.

"Ah, yes; that is a mistake so many of my applicants made; but I have no time to attend to the matter now, as the dinner-bell has just rung, but this afternoon I will see what I can do for

you. Come." And, beckoning Mabel to follow her, she left the room.

About a dozen girls were gathered in the hall, and as many more were hurrying from all directions. They stared curiously at Mabel behind Mrs. Barrett's back, and reminded her very much of so many mischievous young colts.

When they were all assembled at the table Mrs. Barrett introduced her as "Miss Mabel Stewart, from St. Louis, young ladies."

Mabel was quite bewildered at the rows of heads all nodding at her at once, and to her imagination they assumed the aspect of grinning fiends. She was astonished and very much horrified to see the girl next to her whisper to her neighbor while the blessing was being asked. But before long she did not wonder that the girls fidgeted uneasily, or even whispered, for Mrs. Barrett seemed inclined to offer up thanks for every article of food on the table, even to each bean, but it was over at last, and the amen was gratefully echoed in the heart of each girl. The table was long and wide. Mrs. Barrett occupied the head, and Miss Metz the foot. Miss Hadley, another teacher, sat next to her. Miss Shrumberger and Mr. Schenk, the German teachers, sat side by side near the middle of the table.

The gentleman was tall, thin, and brown, with very light tawny hair, bright blue eyes, and glis-

tening white teeth that seemed to fill his capacious mouth to its utmost. He looked nervous and uncomfortable, and appeared to be in constant dread of something or somebody. Frequently he would cast an uneasy, sidelong glance at his companion, who was short and stout, with coal-black hair streaked with gray and restless black eyes that seemed to flash fire, a stern, firm-shut mouth, and a nose that inclined heavenward. There were signs of crow's-feet around her eyes, and two deep lines extended from her nose downwards.

Fifteen girls were ranged on each side and two at each end. The meal was not such as is served at Kepler's, but it was good and substantial, and consisted of bean-soup, pickled pork, potatoes, apple-pie, and milk.

Mabel watched Mrs. Barrett, trying to discover what it was that commanded your respect and admiration, but at the same time repelled your confidence. She found it was a vain task after a few moments, and turned from her to Miss Hadley, who was young and handsome, and had large, beautiful brown eyes, and short, jetty hair that clustered in thick curls around her graceful head.

She smiled when she caught the glance of the blue eyes, and Mabel at once pronounced her the sweetest teacher in the whole school. Amy Grahame sat across from her, and looked as amiable as ever, with her blonde hair piled in a

figure eight on top of her aristocratic head. The style well became the proud, high-bred face, with its fair complexion and large eyes of that rare, pure gray so seldom seen. Her dress of bronze and gold silk was made in the latest fashion, with bows, puffs, and flounces innumerable. Bracelets clasped with amethysts encircled her wrists, a costly necklace hung round her neck, diamonds sparkled in her ears and on her fingers, but it was all worn with that ease and unconsciousness that did not make her look vulgarly overdressed or "shoddy." Her room-mate, Lucia Wilson, sat next to her, and was so different from Amy that you wondered at their being intimate friends, for, although rather dignified, she had a bright, pleasant face and such a delightful way of making you feel at ease with her, that she was much better liked by the majority of the girls than was Amy. The fascinating Bess sat directly opposite Mabel, and the young girl watched her covertly. To her the great centre of attraction was in the young leader, and, notwithstanding that there were very pretty young ladies in the school, Mabel thought her the loveliest, most charming one there; and though not what you would call a beauty, Bess was a very handsome girl. Her luxuriant brown hair fell in glossy braids far below her waist, and on top of the shapely head it rippled and curled in the most bewitching manner. Her eyes, in

color a clear, beautiful brown, were luminous as stars, and laughed saucily beneath their curling fringe. Her complexion was a rich olive, with the faintest tinge of carnation in the dusky cheeks. The ripe, crimson lips were full and mobile, and parted over milk-white teeth. There was an air of saucy independence and leadership about her that characterized her every movement, yet there was none of that domineering or "braggadocio" manner that is so often mistaken by would-be leaders for an evidence of generalship.

Dinner was progressing very nicely, when suddenly there was the sound of breaking glass, and Mr. Schenk sprang to his feet with a red, mortified face, and an exclamation in the language of his fatherland that made all eyes turn to where the poor gentleman stood, gazing ruefully at a white stream trickling down his pantaloon leg. Like a flash of electricity a smile went around the table. Even Amy's aristocratic mouth relaxed and displayed the white, even teeth, of which she was so proud. Miss Shrumberger, looking daggers at the laughing girls, sprang to the professor's assistance, and with her handkerchief helped to wipe up the lacteal fluid. When they resumed their seats, Mrs. Barrett said sternly to the girls, some of whom were fairly shaking, "That will do, young ladies. Miss Brent, unless you can control yourself, pray leave the table."

It is to be supposed that Miss Brent controlled herself, for no one left. Mabel did not dare to look up for fear of laughing; but presently she managed to steal a look in the direction of Mrs. Barrett, but she met the glance of a pair of merry blue eyes, whose owner's shoulders gave an occasional convulsive start, which caused Mabel to speedily become interested in her apple-pie. She did not look up again until dinner was over and the owner of the blue eyes had disappeared.

As the girls filed out into the hall, Mrs. Barrett, who was standing by the door, laid her hand on Mabel's shoulder as she passed. "Wait here a moment," she said, and the young girl obediently stepped aside. To her surprise, she found Bess waiting also. After one glance, Mabel, who was rather shy with strangers, looked some other way, but the acknowledged head of more than thirty girls was not to be ignored in that manner. A hand was laid on Mabel's arm, and a voice said, "Is this your first term at boarding-school, Miss Stewart?"

Thus addressed, Mabel was forced to turn around again and answer that it was, raising her eyes to meet the brown ones, that sparkled with fun, as Bess continued: "I suppose we may look for a showery season, then."

"What has that to do with it?" asked Mabel, in bewilderment.

Bess laughed. "Don't look so puzzled, I will solve the enigma for you. You know, during the freshman year at college, the rest of us that are all salted and pickled down are treated to a series of freshets, *et cætera*, and I——"

"Oh, I see," interrupted Mabel, smiling. "No, you need not look for any freshets from me."

"I'm glad you are so sensible. Looks sometimes deceive; but then you can't judge a man by the cut of his clothes. Now you wouldn't think I could possibly be that,—well, weak and watery; but when I first came here I wept until I literally drowned myself in my own tears. Wept until, like the unfortunate Niobe, I became a stone, so to speak."

In spite of Mrs. Barrett's close proximity Mabel could not help laughing, and just at this juncture the principal joined them, a smile wreathing her own lips, for she had heard every word of the short conversation. As she approached Mabel relapsed into silence, and opening the door of her parlor, Mrs. Barrett entered, followed by Mabel, and, to the latter's great surprise, Bess.

That young lady noticed the look on Mabel's face, and said, "I'm doomed to follow you like your shadow, Miss Stewart."

"Now, young ladies," interrupted Mrs. Barrett's voice, "let us proceed to business. In the first place I shall have to explain to Miss Gra-

hame." And in a few words she told her of Mabel's dilemma. "You are registered as alone this year," she went on to Bess, "and I thought, as every room in the house is taken, that, if agreeable to both parties, Miss Stewart could room with you. If not, then the only thing she can do will be to return home."

"Certainly," answered Bess, without the least hesitation, "it will be perfectly agreeable to me if Miss Stewart——"

"You would be willing?" And Mrs. Barrett turned to Mabel.

Would she? Her heart gave a bound at the thought of being with the popular Bess every day while she was there.

"Yes, ma'am, quite willing," she answered; "but perhaps Miss Grahame has some friend she would prefer to have with her, and I could——"

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed Bess, "not at all; in fact, I would rather have you."

This rather flattering answer raised Mabel almost to the seventh heaven, and Mrs. Barrett rose with a relieved expression.

"Very well, then," she said, "so it is to be considered settled. I will enter your name on the register, Miss Stewart, and have your trunk sent up to No. 8."

The girls then took their departure, and as they went up-stairs arm in arm, Mabel said, "I feel as

though I was intruding on you, Miss Grahame; perhaps after all you would rather be alone."

"Just relieve your mind of both of those ideas instanter, because you are not an intruder, and I don't prefer solitude. The way I happened to be alone this year is this. Last year my room-mate was Nell Brent, and we parted in anticipation of rooming together again this term, but as she is rather delicate, her aunt, Mrs. Barrett, decided to take her with her, so that left me minus. And now, are you satisfied?"

"Yes."

"And promise never to be so naughty again?"

"Yes."

"All right, then; here we are."

They reached the head of the stairs as she spoke. Several girls were grouped around the hall register laughing over the mishap of poor Mr. Schenk.

"Awkward old bore," said one young lady, respectfully; "he shouldn't be allowed to come to our table, because he is always doing something that would make a gravestone laugh, and Mrs. Barrett scolds if we even smile."

"She could hardly keep from it herself," said another young miss, carefully surveying her frizzes in a small mirror which she held in her hand.

"Your kinks are all that can be desired, Letta." This from a pale young girl lounging in the window-seat. Then she continued: "Didn't Miss

Shrumberger look mad, though? I believe she could have killed every one of us."

"She's dead struck after him," said the first speaker again, "and imagines all the other teachers and we girls are too."

Bess interrupted her with a grimace expressive of disgust.

"Doesn't she almost make you sick the way she fawns upon that man? And don't you think the great simpleton is so insane as to suppose that I am just crazy after him? I don't know what she thinks I can possibly see in him to admire."

"She looks at him through rose-colored glasses," said Grace. "But don't you remember, Bess, how mad she got at you last term because he took your part about the translation of that sentence?"

"Yes; and I believe she has that laid up against me until the day of doom."

"I thought Nell would die laughing to-day," said the occupant of the window-seat again, when the laugh at the remembrance of the little episode had subsided.

"Where is she?" asked Bess.

"Here I am," answered a voice, as a slender young girl appeared at the head of the stairs, and the merry eyes again smiled into Mabel's. "I thought I should die, too, Lyn. When I saw you looking at me"—turning to Mabel—"I thought

I should explode; but I didn't want to have to go away, so I managed to keep quiet. I didn't dare look at Bess for fear she would do something ridiculous."

"I'll bet the old grasshopper felt ashamed," said May Forrester.

"Don't bet; it isn't lady-like," said her sister, severely.

"Sometimes practising is as good as preaching," observed Jocelyn, slyly.

Josie's face crimsoned and a sharp retort was on her lips; and just then, as if to soothe their ruffled feelings, the sound of music came from the practice-room. Sweet, delicate notes, rippling and flowing smoothly and gracefully under the fingers of the performer like a tiny brooklet purling through the meadow on a summer's day. The girls stopped voluntarily and listened.

"What an exquisite performer Amy is!" said Grace.

"No wonder, she practises nearly all the time," said Josie.

"Music is Amy's greatest accomplishment, and one that she is very proud of," said Bess, who also took great pride in her cousin's greatest accomplishment.

"Let's go down and hear her," proposed Jocelyn.

"All right!" exclaimed some of the girls, but

others hung back, saying, "Perhaps she won't like it."

"She won't care, will she, Bess?"

Thus appealed to, Bess answered, somewhat hesitatingly, "I guess not."

"You guess? Why, of course she won't," said Lyn, decidedly.

"If you knew, why did you ask?" retorted Bess, saucily.

"She oughtn't to care, when we admire her playing so much." And Lyn prepared to go.

"Come on, then." And Grace turned to follow her example.

"Dithtanth lendth enchantment to the thound for me," lisped one pink-and-white, sentimental young lady, who was reclining gracefully in a small rocking-chair by the register.

"It does for 'most any one when *you* play," retorted Josie, sharply.

Iolanthe's face turned scarlet, but she said nothing, and the girls went down-stairs, chattering like magpies. But when they reached the door of the music-room, which was partly closed, they fell back.

"Go in and ask her if she cares, Bess," whispered the bold Lyn.

"Bess didn't come," said Letta.

"How cute! She thinks to slide out, and then if Amy is mad she can't blame her. A very nice

little game, but she can't play it with me. I say, Bess,"—and flying to the foot of the stairs, Jocelyn looked up to where Bess and Mabel were sitting, peeping through the banisters,—"you think you're awful cute, don't you? Come down here and ask Amy if she cares."

"Why, of course she don't," answered Bess, wickedly. "She oughtn't to, anyway, when we admire her playing so much."

"Bess, I'm getting afraid for you; but do come down, like a jewel that you are. Ah, Bess, do come,"—as Bess sat provokingly still,—"do, you sweet Grahame Gem, thou brightest star in the constellation of girls!"

"Cease, vain flatterer!" exclaimed the brightest star, in a tragical tone; "'tis enough; I come." And drawing Mabel's hand through her arm, she descended the stairs in rather undignified haste, considering her late speech. She disappeared into the music-room, closing the door behind her, and was gone so long that the girls grew impatient; but at last, to their great relief, she came back and said they might come in. This message was received joyfully, and the girls entered. There was no one there but Lucia, who was leaning over the end of the piano in rapt attention. Amy, without turning round, asked her audience what she should play for them.

"Anything you please," said Grace.

"We like any piece when you play it," said Nell, shyly.

"Thank you," said Amy, simply; "I will play your favorite." And she paused inquiringly.

"Tarantelle," answered Nell; and they all looked on in wondering admiration as Amy's white fingers glided over the keys, scarce seeming to touch them as she played. As the last strains died away in melodious silence, Bess said, in obedience to a look from her cousin,—

"Now, girls, that will do. We don't want to tire Amy out, for fear she won't play for us again."

The girls took the hint and rose to go, thanking Amy for the pleasure they had enjoyed. She said nothing, but only bowed. She neither asked them to stay nor to come again, and they retired feeling rather "bluffed," for Amy's manner had been decidedly cool. The dreaming Iolanthe received them with a smile which said, "I know all about it." She and Amy were not the best of friends. Amy abhorred affectation, and be it said, to her credit, that she did not use it, and pronounced Miss Wyville an insufferable bore; and this little bit having reached the "bore's" ears, she retaliated by calling Amy a "thtuck-up arithtocrat." She was also jealous of the latter's superiority in music, and it was another thorn in her flesh that, in spite of all, Amy was more of a favorite than herself. But the sharpest of all was

that Amy's beautiful complexion was entirely natural, while her own was the result of various cosmetics. She had been thinking of her woes as the sweet sounds came up to her, and now, when the girls came back, she was ready to crow over them.

"Tho Mith Amy didn't play much for you after going down," was her salutation.

"It wasn't Amy; it was Bess," said Jocelyn. "She wouldn't let us stay any longer."

"Tho I thought," said the other, in a suggestive tone that exasperated Lyn. She deigned Iolanthe nothing but an angry glance, and soon after the girls departed to their different rooms.

As Mabel unpacked her trunk that afternoon, she said to Bess, who sat by, looking on,—

"I heard the girls talking this afternoon about a Professor Mullenstalk. Is that really his name?"

"You little innocent abroad!" exclaimed Bess, laughing at the look of comical surprise on Mabel's face. "It's easy to be seen that you are not used to nicknaming the pedantic old pedagogues in St. Louis. If you want to preserve your precious cranium intact you had better call him Mulienstalcht."

"Call him *what!*" ejaculated Mabel.

"Muelienstalcht."

"Well, no wonder you call him Mullenstalk."

"Not a bit. One of the girls did accidentally call him that last year, and he poured such a storm of invectives on her unfortunate head that she actually fainted."

"He surely can't be very polite."

"Oh, he's like all Germans,—so smooth and courteous that you almost imagine he is a resurrected old-time chevalier until his temper is aroused, and then look out."

"Are there many teachers in the school?"

"There are six besides those you saw to-day. Miss Hadley, the one with curly hair, is the drawing teacher, and she is almost too sweet to live. My cousin Amy says if ever there was an angel on earth she is one."

"Miss Metz took me into your cousin's room this morning, thinking it was unoccupied, and she didn't seem to like it very well."

"If it had been Miss Hadley she wouldn't have cared, but she and Miss Metz are always at sword's points. You see Io Wyville is Miss Metz's favorite, and she is so anxious for her to come out head in her French class, but Amy beats every time. Io is that silly, lisping girl," added Bess, in an explanatory tone.

"I don't see how any one can even endure her," said Mabel, smiling at the recollection of her.

"She's a bitter pill, but we all manage to swallow her," answered Bess.

Just here a light tap sounded on the door. It proved to be a messenger from Amy, who wanted her cousin at her room immediately, and Bess went with many regrets at leaving her companion alone. Once more left to herself, Mabel turned her thoughts homeward the first thing, and as a natural consequence grew more homesick than ever. The worst forebodings filled her mind, and she imagined all sorts of disasters happening to her family. She saw her father being carried home injured, perhaps killed by a fall from his horse, or again, contracting some dread disease from a patient. Perhaps the house would catch fire some night and burn them all up. Her mother might get sick and die before she (Mabel) could reach home. Lilly might get lost or abducted, and perhaps something might happen to Guy away off at college, and she would never see him again. These, and others of a like character, thronged her brain. Finding she could not shake it off, Mabel gave herself up entirely to the wretched feeling. She was standing before the fire, her hands clasped, the bitter, homesick tears flowing fast down her cheeks, when Bess entered. Mabel made a hasty movement to dash away the tell-tale drops and assume a smiling countenance, but Bess had taken in the situation at a glance, and going up to Mabel, she took both hands in her own, and said, "Listen, Miss Stewart, or Mab, if you will

let me call you so. I know you are a warm-hearted, affectionate girl, and I know from experience how you feel to come among so many strangers, and it doesn't improve things much to have everybody so distant and formal and calling you miss, especially your room-mate. I am not generally attracted toward strangers, but I loved you from the first, so let us drop all formality and feel as if we were old friends. Is 'Barkis willin'?"

Mabel was silent for almost a minute, not from any lack of willingness to accept the proffered friendship. Being rather a sensitive girl, it had been doubly hard for her to meet so many strangers, knowing she would not have one friend among them all, and it was that which had made her more homesick than the mere coming away had done. She was touched and pleased beyond measure by Bess's words, and for a moment could not speak; then she said, shyly, "'Barkis is willin'.'"

"Then let's seal the compact." And the ruby lips were raised invitingly.

A pleased color fluttered in Mabel's cheeks, and without any reluctance she lifted her happy, tear-stained face, and the compact was sealed with one warm, hearty kiss.

CHAPTER III.

A SURPRISE.

THE next day was a busy one. There were classes to be made up, new scholars to be examined, lessons to be assigned for the next day, and everything to be gotten into smooth, running order for the new term.

Professor "Mullenstalk" came to make up his class in music. As usual he went into raptures over Amy's playing, and, as she watched him spreading his broad, fat hands and nodding his enormous head with its crop of shaggy, black hair, Mabel thought, with a shudder, of poor Alice, and when it came her turn to play, it was with trembling fingers that she touched the keys. She was about half-way through "Oberon," the last piece she had taken from Miss Evarts, her former teacher, and one that she was considered perfect in at home, when the professor stopped her, putting out his hands as if to wave her off. Mabel, having become unconscious of everything but the piece she was playing, did not notice him at first, and the professor, thinking she meant to

be impudent, roared "Stop!" at the same time thrusting his fingers into his ears. And Mabel, in utter astonishment, hurt and insulted and with a face scarlet with mortification, stopped.

"Stop, stop!" repeated the professor. "All trash! all trash! You took lessons of a female, —yes?"

"I took lessons from a lady." Mabel unconsciously emphasized the last word. The professor's face flamed for a moment, and Mabel's heart quailed as she thought of the storm that would probably burst upon her, but the teacher controlled himself with an evident effort and answered, with a curl of his lips,—

"I thought so. However, we vill have no more of dat kind of musick. You shall begin at de beginning, down at de scales."

"Sir!" exclaimed Mabel, her eyes widening in surprise, "I was considered an advanced scholar at home."

"Of course, of course; but you are avay from home now, and mine scholare. Nexd time I coomes I vill bring you some books dat you vill study. Dat vill be suffeecient, Mees Mabel. You have a vera nice touch, and we vill soon have you a vera accomplished young lady."

He bowed low, and Mabel took her leave, feeling not in the least degree mollified. Of course she took drawing, for, although her taste for the

art was not very great, she was willing to conquer her dislike for the sake of having the adorable Miss Hadley for a teacher. As a matter of course the young lady required a specimen of her drawing, and Mabel gave it rather reluctantly, but Miss Hadley only said,—

"It will do very nicely. You will go in my second class, but, I think, with diligent practice, you may soon go in my third. I will keep this specimen," she added. "I have about a hundred."

"It's such an ugly thing," said Mabel, glancing scornfully at the bunch of straggling flowers, that looked as if they had been frost-bitten.

"Not at all," answered the young teacher. "I have several a great deal worse than this. Come in my room some time and I'll show you Bess's first attempt. I intend to have the specimens all framed and hung up to remind me of the girls."

"Who are the best artists you have?" asked Mabel; "that is, if you don't mind telling me," she added, thinking perhaps she should not have asked.

"Certainly not, Amy for one; Bess and Alice Dare, but Iolanthe is the best of all."

"Iolanthe!" exclaimed her listener.

"Yes. I thought you would be surprised. I see by your eyes that the girls have been telling you some of her 'cranks,' as they call them. She is very affected, and very few, if any, of

the scholars like her, but I think she feels the slights put upon her by the girls and is too proud to show it. She is a splendid artist, however. She drew a large portrait of myself unknown to me and presented it to me on my last birthday. It is almost perfect. But I must not linger any longer, as there are several others waiting for me. Good-by." And, taking up the specimen, she departed, while Mabel resolved then and there to improve so much that very soon she too could draw something for the beloved teacher that she would pronounce almost perfect. She looked at the hall clock, and, seeing it was almost dinner-time, hurried to her room to dress. Bess was standing before the mirror arranging her hair.

"Halloo!" was her greeting. "What in the world have you been doing that kept you so long?"

"Making a goose of myself," answered Mabel, preparing to make her toilet.

"What?"

"I concluded to take drawing lessons, and Miss Hadley wanted a specimen, and it *was* one."

There was a pause of about two minutes, and Mabel continued: "She said I——" Here she wisely refrained.

"I what?" asked Bess, quickly.

"She said I drew very nicely, and thought in a few months I could go in a higher class."

"Oh!" And Bess seemed satisfied. "Are you going to take German?" she added.

"Yes; and French, too."

"I wish you joy with Miss Metz."

"Why? Do you take French?"

"I takes von oxquisite Shermanes. I finished my course with Miss Metz last year. She is so very strict about the lessons, always gives such long ones, and expects you to learn every comma and period in the whole thing."

"Mercy!" And Mabel began to look alarmed. "And I'm not very good in French either," she added, disconsolately.

"By the way," continued Bess, "I wish you would watch Miss Metz's mouth when she is teaching. It always puts me in mind of hair-oil running out of a bottle when the French words roll out of her mouth."

"What an idea!" laughed Mabel. "But why hair-oil?"

"Because that's the 'oiliest' oil I know."

"What a girl you are! There, I'm all ready; and just in time, too," she added, as the dinner-bell began to ring.

The afternoon passed away all too quickly for the busy teachers, who rushed hither and thither in frantic haste, and Mrs. Barrett looked up from her books with a relieved sigh just as her clock was striking five. Each successive day was as

busy as the first, and Mabel found that instead of having plenty of idle time, as in former school days, she had scarcely a minute to call her own. They had half an hour's recreation after dinner. Then lessons commenced again, and lasted until half-past four. The girls were again free until five o'clock, but the hours that intervened between supper and bedtime were devoted to hard, solid study.

Saturday was a holiday, but the morning was so filled up with tasks that it seemed like any other day of the week. The rising bell was rung half an hour earlier, and immediately after breakfast the girls had to take a bath. The bathing-house, a long, narrow building, was situated at the extreme end of the yard. It contained twelve apartments, and as no young lady was allowed to occupy more than fifteen minutes in bathing, they were usually through in an hour. After that came gymnastics, which lasted half an hour, when the girls had to do their mending, dust their rooms, which had been swept during their absence, and do various other little things that took up their time until dinner, which was always thirty minutes later on Saturday. During the hour after it letters were written home, and the rest of the day the girls could spend as they pleased.

About half-past two, Alice Dare, a lively black-eyed girl, called at No. 8. She was attired in a

skating costume of scarlet and black, and a pair of shining Shirley's were clanking over her arm. "Don't you girls want to go skating?" she asked.

"I can't," said Bess, promptly; "I promised Nell to read 'Paradise Lost' with her this afternoon; but Mabel can go if she wants to."

"Will you go?" And Alice turned to Mabel.

"Of course I will," she answered, as she flew to get ready; and in a very short time they were on their way down-stairs.

At the door they encountered Amy, who was also equipped for skating. She inclined her head slightly to the girls but said nothing, and as they went out the gate together, Alice asked somewhat timidly, for she was afraid of Amy,—

"Are you going to the pond, Amy?"

"Yes," was the answer; "are you?"

"Yes. It's much safer than the river. Ever since Jocelyn fell through Mrs. Barrett won't allow us to go there."

"Jocelyn was very careless to skate where she did," Amy answered, as they hurried across the windy common.

"She profited by her own experience at least, for she has never been skating since," replied Alice.

Nothing more was said, and before long they were at the pond. It was quite black with boys and girls skating in all directions. It took but a

few moments for our girls to join the merry throng, and they were soon skimming gayly over the smooth, glassy surface.

Presently Mabel caught sight of Amy skating slowly around, arm in arm with a tall, handsome young man in a fur cap. He had a clerical air about him, and his face looked strangely familiar.

"Where have I seen him?" mused Mabel. "I can't think, but I know I've seen that face somewhere."

She was still puzzling over it, when Alice came gliding up.

"What are you looking at, Queen Mab?" she asked.

"Amy and that young man, and I was wondering where I had seen him."

Alice looked at the young couple indicated. They were in the midst of an interesting conversation, it seemed, for now and then a smile broke over the gentleman's face, and occasionally Amy's rippling laugh was heard. "My goodness!" was her comment, "but Amy is breaking rules with a vengeance. We are not allowed to even look at the young men, and just see her."

"Who is the young man?" asked Mabel.

"Mr. Blackmore, the minister at the chapel. This is his second year here."

"Is his name Frank, and is he a Presbyterian?"

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"Yes; but why do you look so excited?"

"Mamma's youngest brother is named Frank Blackmore, and he was studying for the ministry the last time she heard from him. He was to graduate soon after, and that has been a little over two years ago."

"This is Mr. Blackmore's first charge. Perhaps he is your uncle. Did you ever see him before?"

"I never saw him in my life. Mamma has a picture of him taken just before he graduated, and it looks just exactly like this Mr. Blackmore. I had been wondering where I had seen him."

"Then this must be the same one. If I was you I would ask him. Do, Mab; it is rather romantic."

"Oh, I don't like to. It may not be him after all, and then I would be a pretty goose. He would think I was rather bold."

"Come with me, and I'll introduce you."

"Oh, to be sure. I had forgotten you knew him. Well, you may do that."

Both girls seemed utterly regardless of the fact that they were breaking the rules as well as Amy, and skated towards her and her companion.

As they came up the young minister lifted his cap courteously, and Alice said, "Mr. Blackmore, this is Miss Stewart, one of our new scholars from St. Louis."

As the young man bowed to Mabel his face took on a look of pleased surprise.

"Dr. T. F. Stewart's daughter?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," answered Mabel, equally excited.

"Well, well!" And grasping both her hands cordially, he bestowed a kiss on the smiling mouth. "Mabel, I never expected to see you here. And you live in St. Louis. That accounts for my not hearing from you. I kept writing to I—— all the time. You don't know how glad I am to see you. I would have known you any place from those eyes. It seems almost as if I had sister back again." And he kissed Mabel once more in boyish delight. "But excuse me." And he turned to the astonished Amy: "I ought to explain. This young lady is my niece, the daughter of my only sister."

"Indeed!" said Amy. "Then this is quite a pleasant surprise. But how does it happen that you knew nothing about your sister's living in St. Louis?"

"We've only been living there a little over two years," said Mabel. "Uncle Frank kept writing to us at I——, our former home, and mamma to ——"

"It's all mixed up somehow," interrupted Uncle Frank. "However, we will get straightened out now."

At this juncture two college-boys came skating

up. They pounced immediately on Amy and Alice, the young minister glided off with his newly-found niece, and between the six the short afternoon wore merrily away, and they went home with glowing cheeks and sharp appetites. Some of the girls were clustered around the hall register, others were walking up and down, while the sound of music and the tap of merry feet came from the practice-room. Mabel looked in Nell's room for Bess, but she was not there. No. 8 was also minus the Grahame Gem.

"I wonder where she went to," said Mabel, stirring the dying embers in the grate into a brighter blaze.

"Perhaps she is up in my room," suggested Amy, who had followed Mabel to her door. "Come up and see." And as Mabel obeyed she decided that Amy wasn't so proud and disagreeable after all. Sure enough, Bess was at No. 16, playing chess with Lucia, who had the headache and had to stay in. She looked up as the girls entered, bringing a gust of cold air with them.

"It's a fine thing you're back!" she exclaimed. "Just look at the clock!"

Mabel looked. The hands pointed to twenty minutes after five.

"Oh, my!" she cried, springing up from the chair she had taken. "Do I have to dress for supper?"

"You had better not appear in that costume," said Amy, hastening to make her own toilet.

"Then I'd better hurry up about it. Come on, Bess, and help me." And Mabel flew down-stairs, followed by Bess. With all her rush she was barely ready when the bell sounded; and as they went down-stairs they met Amy and Lucia, whose headache did not excuse her from appearing at the table. Alice was in her accustomed place, and from her appearance it was evident that her toilet had been hastily made also. Iolanthe was there, sitting next to Miss Metz, and as she glanced at the three flushed faces, she sniffed contemptuously, and pronounced them hoydens, for to her eyes skating was a boyish sport, and ought never to be indulged in by girls of true refinement. After supper, as they were gathered in the hall for their Saturday good-night talk, as they called it, she said to Grace Arbut, in a tone loud enough for all to hear,—

"I think thkating ith tho hoydenith, don't you? A refined perthon would never indulge in it."

"Well, as long as *you* are refined, you need not worry about the rest of us," said Alice, sententiously.

"Eavethdropperth never hear any good of themselveth," retorted Iolanthe.

Alice looked scornfully at her, but preserved perfect silence, and the subject dropped.

CHAPTER IV.

SUNDAY.

"To-morrow is Sunday," said Mabel that night as they were going to bed. "I do hope it will be bright and nice."

To which Bess replied, with a sigh, "Yes, to-morrow is Sunday. I wish we never had one."

"Why, Bess!" exclaimed Mabel, aghast.

"You just wait, and to-morrow night you'll echo my sentiments."

"Never!" thought Mabel. She kept her opinion to herself, however, and the two girls were soon wrapped in slumber.

The rising-bell rang earlier the next morning, so the girls could prepare for church, which they were obliged to attend. If it had been at the chapel, where the young Mr. Blackmore presided, not a murmur would have been heard, but, unfortunately, it was not, and there was much inward grumbling among the girls as they were marshalled to church by Miss Metz.

For one solid hour and a half the poor girls were forced to sit on hard wooden benches, with

backs just high enough to be worse than no backs at all, and listen to a dull, uninteresting discourse by the Rev. Mr. Silverton. He spoke very slowly and distinctly, pausing between each word to let their meaning sink deeply into the sinful minds before him, and once when Iolanthe let her hymn-book fall, he looked around at her in such mild surprise that Bess said he put her in mind of a sedate old cow. And even Mabel, who was very strict about her behavior in church, could not repress a smile.

After service they walked very slowly and solemnly back to the seminary, looking, as Bess said, as though they had been to their own funerals.

Then came dinner, which was always the same on Sunday. It was the only meal at which they were allowed to talk, and each girl had to give one impression she had received from the morning sermon. The afternoon was partly devoted to Scripture study, when they all assembled in the school-room with their Bibles, and were taught by Mr. Silverton, who had very kindly volunteered his services.

Here, as everywhere, only a few were interested in these meetings. Iolanthe was one of the few. She asked the most questions, and was one of the first to give her explanations of the texts introduced; but it was the cause of more ridicule than praise from the girls.

"Iolanthe expects to be a preacher's wife at some dimly distant day, and wants to be prepared," scornfully said Jocelyn, who was a decided unbeliever. "And even if she had no such worthy object in view, it is all foolishness and a sheer waste of time to study the Bible. If there is a God, and he intended for us to know all the mysteries in his Holy Book, he would have found some way to have revealed them to us without all this worry and flurry."

"Why, Lyn!" And Mabel looked at her in horror.

"Oh, I'm a blackened sinner,—that's what St. Iolanthe calls me,—and it's no use for you to turn goody and try to reform me, for it's an utter impossibility." And Lyn laughed.

Mabel stood silent. She knew not what to say, for this new phase of Jocelyn's character dumfounded her.

"Oh, Jocelyn, I hope it is not impossible!" she said at last, in a tone that made the girl look at her curiously for a moment; but she gave no answer, and walked away.

Iolanthe came sailing up and wound her arm around Mabel's waist.

"My dear Mabel," she said, "you have hardly thpoken to me all day. Are you mad at me?" And she gazed affectedly into Mabel's eyes with her own really pretty dark ones.

"Certainly not. What have I to be mad at?" answered Mabel, somewhat coldly. She disliked Iolanthe, and the caressing tone and motion she assumed made her feel nervous.

"I hope I haven't done anything," pursued Iolanthe, clasping Mabel's hand in hers. "It alwayth maketh me feel badly to have my friendth mad at me."

"Why, I'm not mad," reiterated Mabel, fidgeting uneasily in the girl's affectionate clasp. "I wish you would believe me."

"Oh, I'm tho glad!" And her tormentor gave her an ecstatic squeeze. "Come up to my room, deareth, and thpend a while with me. Then I'll really believe you."

Mabel looked distressed. She did not want to offend Iolanthe by refusing, but the girl and her fawning, affected ways were so distasteful to her.

"Thilence giveth conthent," Iolanthe broke in upon her thoughts, and Mabel was forced to yield.

As they ascended the stairs together they met Nell coming down. She opened her eyes very wide at Mabel, and made a grimace, then frowned and shook her head. Mabel smiled grimly. She really felt ashamed to have Iolanthe's arm around her waist.

Io looked after Nell with a sneer.

"That Nell Brent thinkth the ith tho thtylith and pretty."

"She is one of the nicest girls in the whole school!" exclaimed Mabel, warmly. "She's just as sweet as she can be, and—and she's natural."

At any other time Iolanthe would have given it to that "white-faced chit," as she privately called Mabel, but she had an idea in her sentimental head, and only answered, "Oh, well, it don't matter. I didn't mean to make you mad."

"If I could only see Bess," thought Mabel; "I know she would save me some way."

But Bess was not to be seen any place, and as they came in sight of Iolanthe's room, which was on the third floor, Mabel knew that she was doomed. She had tried to feel kindly towards the girl, and finding it impossible, thought the best thing she could do was to keep away from her, for the very sight of the doll-like face irritated her.

And now as Iolanthe pushed her into a comfortable rocking-chair by the window, and seated herself at her feet, Mabel's feelings were not to be envied.

"Did you notice how Mith Amy looked at me to-day?" began Iolanthe, toying with the fringe on Mabel's dress. "The looked mad and jealouth, and like the would almotht cry."

"Why should she look that way?" demanded Mabel.

"I don't much like to tell, but if you'll promith to keep it a thecret I will."

"Well," answered Mabel, in a tone that implied assent. She could have shaken herself as soon as the word was spoken. To think that she was so disgusted with Iolanthe, and then would turn round and listen to one of her "thecrets"! Why didn't she tell her she had no desire to hear it? But no, it was done now, and there was no help for it, so Mabel prepared to listen.

"The young minithter over there at the chapel ith tho fathinating," commenced Iolanthe. "And all the girlth are in love with him, and Amy thinkth that he ith thtruck on her, but he ithnt. I—he thinkth—you know—a great deal—loveth me. I know he doeth, but how I know I muthtn't tell." Here Iolanthe paused with a coy side-glance at Mabel, who only said,—

"Of course not; I don't want you to tell."

She felt sure that what Iolanthe was telling about herself was nothing more nor less than a downright falsehood.

The narrator looked disappointed. She had not bargained for an answer of that kind, but she continued,—

"To-day, when we were going to church, he bowed to me from hith window, and Amy thought it wath meant for her, and the wath tho bold ath to flirt with him."

"Why shouldn't she bow to him when she is acquainted with him?" asked Mabel.

"But the got acquainted with him by flirting," persisted Iolanthe. "Do you know him?"

"I have heard of him," replied Mabel, more disgusted than ever. She could see no possible connection between Iolanthe's remarks, and rose to go; but Io held her back and kept her incessant chatter until Mabel could have boxed her ears with right good will.

It was a good hour before relief came in the sound of the tea-bell, and with a grateful sigh she sprang up and opened the door. But, alas poor Mabel! she was only jumping from the frying-pan into the fire, for just as she emerged from Iolanthe's room Mrs. Barrett passed. She glanced at Mabel, and was going on, but suddenly stopped.

"Miss Stewart, have you been visiting Miss Wyville?"

Mabel hesitated a moment. It would take too long to explain matters, and, after all, it was visiting, no matter how unwilling it had been on her part; so she answered, wondering all the while why Mrs. Barrett should ask the question,—

"Yes, ma'am."

"Did you know that there was a rule against Sunday visiting?"

"No, ma'am."

"Well, it is one of the most important rules we

have, and no matter how unconsciously you have broken it, it cannot go unpunished. You will learn two chapters in your Latin for to-morrow instead of one, and also receive a black mark. I am very sorry, but we have to be *very* strict about enforcing that rule."

Poor Mabel! She turned first red then white, while tears of mortification and anger sprang to her eyes.

"Iolanthe knew," was her first thought; "she did it on purpose. But no, that is unkind; I must not think that; but, oh, just to think!"

Her face burned and felt as if it had swelled to twice its natural size, and it seemed to her as if all the girls that were gathering in the hall knew of her disgrace. Never in all her life before had she received a reproof at school, and she felt that she was forever disgraced.

If it had been any of the others, Alice or Lyn, or even Bess, they would have taken it as a matter of course, and troubled themselves no more about it; but Mabel could have gone through a knot-hole, had there been any in the floor, and entered the dining-room with a look of shame on her downcast face. Bess saw it, and wondered what could be the matter. She herself had been perched in a hidden corner of the school-room, where was a well-stocked book-case, reading a forbidden Sunday book, "The Fudge Family," and having

been discovered by Miss Metz, had also received a black mark; but Bess's heart was as light with that sign of her disgrace staring her in the face as she had been before. She was anxious to know, though, what had happened to Mabel, and when they were safely locked in their own room she asked,—

"Mab, what has happened to you? Your face is as long as Mr. Silverton's sermon was this morning."

Mabel was silent for a few moments, and then she told the whole story. When she was through Bess drew a long breath.

"Well," she said, "I can't express myself, but it was decidedly mean in Iolanthe. I don't see what reason she had for doing it. You never mind, my dear; you are not branded with the mark of Cain, so don't worry, and we'll see."

The next morning a committee of one waited on Mrs. Barrett, and after explaining to her, asked that the mark and two chapters of Latin might be lifted from Mabel's mental shoulders.

But after a careful consideration of the facts the principal decided that although the fault was not entirely Mabel's, if she were lenient once she would have to be again; but much to her surprise Iolanthe was summoned to Mrs. Barrett's room that afternoon, and, judging by her looks when she came out, her interview with that lady had not been altogether a pleasant one.

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CHAPTER V.

A BENEVOLENT SOCIETY.

"BESS," said Mabel, one Saturday afternoon, looking up from the book she was reading, "I have been reading here about four girls who went together all the time and were called 'the Quartette,' and it has put an idea into my head."

"What?" asked Bess, laying down her own book, and looking up with an interested face.

"Why, this: for some of us girls to get together and form a sort of club, and agree to stick to each other through thick and thin, and if we hear anything about each other,—that is, anyways detrimental to our character,—be the last to believe it, the first to defend."

"Et cætera, exactly. I see, and think it a splendid idea. Who will we have? We only want a few. Let me see, Nell——"

"Yes, Nell and Alice and Lou, Jocelyn, Letta, and Connie Duhme. That, with ourselves, will make eight."

"That will be enough; and we must have some sort of a badge, and an alphabet of our own, in

case private communication is necessary," continued Bess.

"Of course. Let's organize right away. Where will I find the girls?"

"You will find Alice and Lou in their room, right across the hall; Nell, down-stairs, most likely in her room; Lyn and her inseparable Letta you will be apt to find in the music-room practising their duet,—I thought I heard the sound of music a few minutes ago; and if you go to Miss Hadley's room, sitting at her feet in rapt devotion you will be sure to find Connie. I never saw any girl so much in love with another as that girl is with Miss Hadley. She just lives on her every word. I don't believe she cares two cents for any other human being in creation; her whole mind is centred upon one object, and that object Miss Genevieve, as she calls her."

"Oh, oh, Bess! Of course she cares for her father and mother and home more than for anybody else. She thinks a great deal of Miss Hadley, I know, but then, who can help it? You do yourself."

"I know it. I dearly love her, but I don't make her my idol, and fall down and worship her."

"And Connie does," supplied Mabel, smiling.

"Exactly; however, my love, we won't quarrel

about that. You go and find the members to be, and we'll decide about the society."

It took but a few minutes to hunt up the girls in question, and in a very short time an eager little group was assembled in No. 8. Then Mabel explained her plan to them, and it was received with school-girl enthusiasm.

"How perfectly splendid!" exclaimed Letta. "Don't you think so, Joce?"

"Yes, indeed," assented Jocelyn.

"What shall we call our society?" asked Nell, "for I believe we're all in favor of having one," she added, looking around at the others, who all nodded.

"When I went to school in New York we had a society, and called it 'Our Clique,'" said Connie.

"Let's call ours the Queen Mab Club," suggested Lou. "Or," she added, seeing Mabel shake her head, "the Jolly Juniors."

"Mutual Admiration Society," said Letta.

"That's too stale," said Alice, with a contemptuous little sniff. "Give us something fresh."

"Take yourself, for instance," was the sly retort.

"Cutie," said Alice, as a laugh followed this remark, "how long did it take you to learn that off?"

"Humph! You think you're ahead, don't you?" answered Letta.

"Attention!" ordered Bess, who had instituted

herself chairman, "or we'll have to call it the Squabble Club."

"The Cling-together Club would be a good name," remarked Jocelyn.

Several other names followed, each one as absurd as its predecessor, until the room rang with laughter, and each girl tried to outdo her neighbor in her powers of invention.

"A name! a name! My kingdom for a name!" cried Bess, in distraction, thrusting her fingers into her ears. "Do for mercy's sake, girls, somebody, give me a name!"

"Well, that's kind," returned Alice, "when we've been giving you names by the wholesale."

"But I want *a* name, not a dozen."

"Oh, well, how does the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to School-Girls suit you?"

"Perfectly. I couldn't have done any better myself, so I suppose you all agree that S. P. C. S. it shall be."

The girls all nodded assent, laughing at Bess's impromptu rhyme.

"Now that we have decided upon a name at last, let's turn our attention to an appropriate motto for our society," continued the chairman.

"Let's take Delaware's motto, 'Liberty and independence,'" suggested Alice.

"Louisiana's the best," said Mabel: "'Union and confidence.'"

"Or Kentucky's: 'United we stand, divided we fall,'" said Connie.

After some discussion "Union and confidence" was settled upon, because, as Nell said, "union" really meant one, and "confidence," trust.

"If you are going to have an alphabet, use Morse's," suggested Connie. "We used it in our society. It's in the back of our Philosophy. We had lots of fun writing letters that nobody but ourselves could read."

"We'll have it by all means," said the chairman. "What next?"

"Badges," said Alice.

"Scarlet ribbons, marked with the initials of our society," suggested Lou.

"What a brilliant set we are!" observed Bess, as she nodded her head approvingly. "Now for a president. I believe the next thing is 'nominations are in order.'"

"Mabel," said Lou.

"Second it," came from Alice.

"Then in the presence of these witnesses I proclaim——" began the chairman, solemnly.

"I object." And the prospective president rose to her feet.

"What for?" "No, you don't." "Because I won't make——" "Yes, you will," came from all parts of the room, mingled with Mabel's protests.

"All in favor——" began Bess.

"Ay! ay!" shouted the girls. And Mabel sat down amid a clapping of hands.

"I nominate Bess for scribe," said Lyn, when the excitement had subsided.

"And you for Pharisee," retorted Bess, quickly.

A laugh followed this remark, and Lyn's face flushed, but she said nothing.

"Never mind, Lyn," went on Bess; "no offence meant. If you decline to be Pharisee, we'll have you for honorary member. Well, I guess there is no more business to transact," she added, "so we will adjourn. Next Saturday we will hold our first meeting here, and each member must feel obliged to contribute something towards the entertainment."

The meeting then adjourned for a general good time, which was only interrupted by the ringing of the tea-bell.

Promptly at three o'clock the next Saturday afternoon a company of eight girls, proudly displaying their badges of scarlet ribbon worked with gold letters, assembled in No. 8. When all was in order, Bess mounted a small stool, cleared her throat, and began in a pompous tone, "Ladies and gentlemen, and honorary member,"—as she caught sight of Lyn,—"at this, the first meeting of the S. P. C. S., it has been deemed proper that a few appropriate remarks should be made, and I have—ahem!—been chosen for that honor.

The aim of this society is a noble one, namely, to lift that poor, struggling, grovelling mass of abused humanity, the school-girl, from the inglorious position she now occupies beneath the foot of a tyrannical school-marm to a glorious one on the heights of independence, and—and—I do declare that word has escaped my memory now." Here the noble orator paused a moment and placed her hand upon her classic brow, and finally, after many bows and ahems, proceeded: "May the hinges of this praiseworthy institution never be covered with the rust of discord, contention, or distrust; but if such should be the case, may we pour on the oil of love and charity and forbearance, and—and we will come out swimmingly." And fearing to trust her memory further, the modest speaker bowed and retired with many blushes amidst the applause of her hearers.

"Now," said the president, "we will be entertained by Miss Alice E. Dare."

Miss Dare stood bashfully up. "My poem is short and sweet, but is not original," she said. And bowing low, began:

"Twinkle, twinkle, diminutive type of nebular condensation,
How I meditate upon your composition,
Situated above this oblate spheroid at such an altitude,
In similitude an infinitesimal crystallization of carbon in the blue empyrean."

As this somewhat startling poem was recited the girls stared in blank amazement, and Bess gave a groan.

"If I may be allowed a word," she said, "I would suggest that any one who recites any more such poems be expelled from our society."

"I thought it would be beyond your comprehension," remarked Alice, calmly, as she sat down.

"No sparring allowed," said the president, rapping sharply with her pencil to restore order. "Letta has something for us."

Letta got up, and without any preliminaries read,—

"JUPITER AND HIS SATELLITE.

"INSCRIBED TO MISS IO SHRUMBERGER.

"Jupiter had a satellite,
  Io was its name,
And everywhere that planet went
  Io always came.

"It followed him to school one day,
  It made the scholars shout;
But when they thought they'd have some fun,
  The teacher put them out.

"Poor Jupiter could scarcely stir
  Without his satellite;
It won for him a queer nickname,
  It was 'The Short-tailed Kite.'

"He tried his best to rid himself
Of his persistent moon,
But finding it was useless, he
To fate resigned him soon.

"What makes the moon love the planet so?
The scholars eager cry;
That is a riddle we give up,
The teachers all reply."

As Letta folded up her paper and sat down there was a burst of applause, for Mr. Schenk's name was Jupiter, and it was well known the persecutions that he underwent from Miss Shrumberger.

"Are there any more poems to read?" asked the president.

There were none, so Nell proposed that they play games.

"All right," said Mabel. "What shall we play?"

"I know one, but you must not laugh; if you do, you pay a forfeit," said Connie. "Some one says to her left-hand neighbor, 'My ship has come home from China,' and when asked what it brought says, 'One fan,' at the same time waving her hand. I'll start it, and you do just as I do." She turned to Nell, and began, "My ship has come home from China."

"What did it bring?" asked Nell.

"One fan," replied Connie, waving her hand to and fro.

Nell repeated the words in her turn, and also simulated fanning. The question was asked and the motion imitated until it went all around the circle. Then Connie made the same announcement a second time, but this time her ship brought two fans; so both hands had to be kept waving back and forth. Thus it went on, each time more "fans" being brought, until the girls' hands, feet, and heads were going vigorously, and even their eyes were winking, and they looked for all the world like a row of nodding mandarins. Of course it was impossible to keep from laughing; some of the girls were fairly shrieking with mirth, but they were obliged to keep up their "antics" until Connie stopped, though they finally had to stop from utter inability to laugh and "fan" at the same time.

"What a ridiculous game!" exclaimed Lou, holding on to her sides.

"If Mrs. Barrett had happened in when we were all 'nid, nid, nodding,' she would have thought us a set of idiots," added Alice.

"Do you know any more games, Con?" asked Letta.

"This is a good one," was Connie's answer, and she explained: "Each one writes their name on a slip of paper and throws it in a box or bas-

ket. Then the slips are shaken up and you all draw one. The leader then stands up and calls off your names as fast as possible. Whenever your own name is called you make no answer, but when the name is called that is on the slip you hold you get up and turn around. It's lots of fun. We used to play it at 'Our Clique.'"

"Let's try it," said Mabel.

They were all quite eager to test the new game, and as Connie was the only one among them who had ever played it, she was chosen leader. She was quite a lively leader, too, for she called the girls' names in such rapid succession that they got all mixed up, some of them answering to their own names as well as to those on their slips, and others, to avoid making mistakes, sitting still when they should have arisen.

All this, as may be imagined, was very entertaining to girls of sixteen and seventeen, but they considered it fine fun, and entered into the sport with all the zest of children of six, and when the bell rang for supper they all exclaimed, with one accord, "Oh, pshaw! why couldn't that bell have waited a little longer, when we were having such a good time?"

CHAPTER VI.

SABRINA SMITH.

ABOUT the second week of December, Mrs. Barrett's private servant left her, and she advertised in the daily papers for another one. Two evenings after this, as it was examination week, and consequently no studying, Mabel, Bess, Lou, and Alice were invited to spend the evening in Nell's room. As the four (Bess had gone to bed with the headache) were sitting around the cosey fire, with Mrs. Barrett in their midst, there came a shuffling as of many feet upon the piazza, followed by the clanging of the door-bell. Then there was the sound of voices, low at first, then gradually growing louder, and one of them, unmistakably belonging to a darkey, appeared to be uppermost in the jangle.

"What *can* be the matter?" exclaimed Mrs. Barrett, rising and starting towards the door; but at that moment it was opened, and a red, distressed face appeared. It was Lizzie, one of the dining-room girls.

"Shure, ma'am, it isn't my fault," she said, in troubled tones. "I didn't want her to come in, but she would do it." And muttering something about "You're mighty keen to get in, but I bet you won't stay," she ushered in a dilapidated representative of Africa. Mrs. Barrett stopped short in amazement as the apparition advanced towards her. The darkey, who was rather plump and tall, was arrayed in a faded green and red plaid skirt, which came half-way up to her knees, displaying grimy white hose and a pair of rusty, muddy, half-laced shoes. A torn yellow waist trimmed with ragged fringe adorned the upper portion of her body. A thin, tattered shawl was pinned tightly around her neck and flying back over her shoulders. A small sun-bonnet covered her head, and was tied down with a thin green veil that dimly concealed her features. Thick, woolly "bangs" fell over her forehead. Beneath them gleamed a pair of very bright eyes. Her skin was as black and shiny as jet, and a rent in her sleeve showed a round ebony arm. The ruffles on her skirt were torn off at different intervals, and one or two loops, being considerably longer than the rest, caught in her feet as she walked, or shuffled rather, for the awkward, ungainly steps she took could scarcely be dignified by the name of a walk. This queer specimen of humanity nodded abruptly to Mrs. Barrett, and,

going up to the fire, spread her hands before the blaze.

"My, missus! it's a cold night for a poah niggah like me to be out in."

"It is quite cold," answered Mrs. Barrett, more amazed than ever at the girl's actions. "Did you wish anything of me?" she added, as the darkey stood looking around the room in a sort of cool impudence.

"Yes, missus; I'se come to see 'bout dat piece you writ in de papeh."

"That piece I wrote in the paper," repeated Mrs. Barrett.

"Yes, missus. De piece what said you wanted a se'ving lady."

"Oh! My advertisement for a maid."

"Dat's it, missus. Well, I'se one of dem kind."

"Oh, you are? Well, have you ever lived out before?"

"Yes, missus; two times."

"Did you ever live long at a place?"

"Yes, missus; I libed at one place one yeah, lackin' all but one month."

Mrs. Barrett could not help smiling, and the amused girls settled themselves for some fun.

"I tell you, missus, dis yere fiah feels good," went on the strange creature, seating herself and putting her feet up on the fender.

"It seems to me you are rather thinly clad to be out such a night as this," remarked Mrs. Barrett. "How does it come?"

"Lordy, missus, I can't help it. De last place whar I libed de missus only gib me fifty cents a week, and I was dar only about seben days; and do you expect a poah niggah like me to dress in sealskin and satin on fifty cents a week?"

"Well, hardly," answered the amused lady. "Why did you leave your place?"

"Good land, missus! you must be awful dumb. Why, I jes' told you I couldn't s'port myself on fifty cents a week."

"But if you had stayed long enough your fifty cents would have multiplied itself. However, that has nothing to do with the present. What is your name?"

"Sabriny Smith, missus, and I'se Southern, ebery inch of my bones and de marrow throwed in. Laudy! but didn't dis poah niggah hab some hebenly times down Souf wo'king fo' de quality folks. I tell you, missus, I wasn't 'shamed ob dem if dey was white. I tell you, folkeses, it's lots different from libin' down heah 'mong de poah white trash."

"Why did you leave the South, then?" asked Nell, involuntarily. The darkey turned around quickly.

"What's dat you say, missy? What I leave

de Souf fo'h? Reduced carcumstances, missy. Reduced carcumstances, missy, will do most anything if dey once gets de uppah hand ob you."

"So you have seen better times?" said Mrs. Barrett.

"Yes, missus, I has; but I hain't got time to be foolin' round heah much longeh. I wants to know if I'se hi'ed."

"Hired! Why, you have not answered my questions yet."

"Hain't answered no questions! I'd like to know, missus, what I'se been doin' eber since I come in?"

"But I mean questions pertaining to the situation."

"Oh, dat's no difference, missus; I wouldn't feel no moah satisfied 'bout yuah character after you got through dan I do now. Besides, I don't like to work foah a lady dat asks too many whys and whats of a poah niggah like me. It shows she am too inquisitive by whole."

"And I should say, Miss Sabrina Smith, that you are too impudent by whole," answered Mrs. Barrett, her anger aroused by the audacity of the applicant for lady's-maid.

"Dat doesn't 'stonish me, missus. Fact I'd be moah 'stonished if you didn't say so. Ebery white lady I comes across tells me I'se sassy, and fact, missus, I doesn't doubt dere 'racity. But

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I'll tell you, missus, I wouldn't do it foah ebery white lady, but if you'll hiah me,—jes' foah one week anyhow,—I'll work foah you at fifty cents a week, boardin' and beddin' throwed in. You'll neber regret it, missus, foah I'se a boss hand at makin' fiehs, drawin' wateh, blackin' boots, an'——"

"But that's not the work of a lady's-maid," interrupted Mrs. Barrett, impatiently. "And you would not suit me anyway, so you may feel excused from any further conversation on the matter and are at liberty to go."

The darkey looked at her for some moments and then drew a long sigh.

"Well, missus, if I can't suit you nohow, if you won't hiah me even foah a week, jes' let me stay ober night. You see, missus, it's a awful long ways out in de country where I lib, and it'll be mos' midnight befoah I could get dere."

"Certainly," answered Mrs. Barrett. "I am willing for you to stay all night, and will give you your breakfast in the morning." And she pulled the bell-cord hanging over the mantel.

"Thank you, missus; I knowed dar was some kindness left in you. And if you please, missus, I'd like to sleep by myself. I hain't used to dividin' my room with nobody."

"Most assuredly you may sleep by yourself," said Mrs. Barrett, with a smile at the girl's pre-

sumption. "Lizzie," to the girl who appeared just then, "show this young lady up to that little room over the kitchen."

"Yes, ma'am," answered Lizzie, glaring at the cause of all this trouble, who followed her meekly up the stairs, making faces at her conductress as she went.

Sabrina entered the little room over the kitchen, slamming the door vehemently, and turning the key in the lock loud enough to be heard by the retreating Lizzie.

Meanwhile, down in Mrs. Barrett's room, the girls were having a hearty laugh.

"How cute she was!" said Nell.

"She isn't *green* if she is *black*," remarked Mabel.

"Why, Mabel! Mabel! What is the matter with you?" exclaimed Lou. "I'm afraid brain-fever is going to set it."

"I do wish Bess had been here," said Alice.

"She would have laughed herself sick," went on Nell. "She enjoys anything comical so much, and I must say that that darkey was too comical."

"By whole," added Lou.

Mrs. Barrett made no comments. There was something strange about the girl and her desire to stay overnight.

"However," she said to herself, "we'll know more about it in the morning."

When Mabel went to her room that night she was still laughing over the little adventure, and resolved to awaken Bess the first thing, if she was asleep, and tell her about it. But when she looked at her room-mate the laugh died on her lips, for Bess's cheeks were unusually red. In fact, her whole face was very much flushed, and her breath came in short, quick gasps through the tremulous lips.

"Why, Bess!" exclaimed Mabel, laying her hand on Bess's forehead, which she found to be hot. "What is the matter? Have you got a fever?"

There was no answer, and stooping nearer, Mabel caught a glimpse of tear-wet lashes.

"Bess," she cried, beginning to feel greatly alarmed, "do tell me what ails you! What are you crying about?"

"Nothing," answered Bess, her voice trembling with emotion.

"Then what makes you act so oddly?"

"I'm subject to such spells," said Bess, sitting up in bed, and looking wild, to Mabel's excited imagination. "I do wish you would come to bed, Mab, and stop asking questions. You're too inquisitive by half."

"By whole, you mean," said Mabel, Sabrina's expression occurring to her.

To her surprise Bess burst into a merry peal of laughter.

"Mabel, you innocent little goose! don't stand there like you were petrified. Come here, and I tell you something that will 'stonish you."

Bess's laugh was so infectious that Mabel could not help joining in, though she stared at her as if she thought she had taken leave of her senses, however, with a feeling of relief that she was not sick.

"Bess, what *are* you laughing at?" she asked, as Bess lay back on her pillow with the tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Do keep still a minute and I'll tell you something funny," she added, with a sudden fear that Bess might be getting the hysterics.

"Well, you come here, and I'll tell *you* something funny."

Reaching out her hand, she pulled Mabel towards the bed, and, drawing her head down, whispered something in her ear. Mabel raised her head slowly and looked at Bess with wide-open eyes and mouth, as though she hardly credited her own senses. Then with a long-drawn breath she ejaculated "Bess!" and began to laugh as heartily as did Bess.

"What *will* the girls say?" she exclaimed, as she stopped for breath.

The next morning, as Nell met Mabel and Bess, she exclaimed,—

"Oh, Mabel, now we'll have some more fun. Lizzie has gone up to waken that 'poah niggah.'

Bess, you must know about that, so you can enjoy it, too, when she comes down-stairs."

"Oh, Nell, don't you think——" And Mabel whispered to her.

Nell stared at them for a moment, and then burst into a laugh.

"Well, Bess! You awful girl! What won't you do next?"

"Hush!" answered Bess. "Here comes Lizzie."

The girl came running down-stairs with an exasperated face.

"The ugly little imp of Satan!" she exclaimed, in tones that did not indicate a very friendly feeling towards the poor "imp."

"What is the matter, Lizzie?" asked Nell.

"Sure that dir-r-r-ty little nagur won't answer me at all," answered the girl. "An' I've knocked an' knocked an' knocked, an' not a wurrud will she say. I never seen such impudence."

She disappeared in Mrs. Barrett's room, and soon returned accompanied by that lady, whose face wore the look of one whose patience had been sorely tried.

After knocking and calling until she saw it was of no use, Mrs. Barrett sent for her colored man, and the door was burst open. Then an astonishing fact was revealed to them. The room was minus Sabrina Smith.

That she had stayed but a short time was evi-

dent, for the bed had been unoccupied, but how had she managed to make her escape? True, she could have gone through the window, for it had a spring lock, and could be easily fastened from the outside. A shed-roof ran about a foot below the window, but how had Sabrina contrived to get from that? It was too high for her to jump off, and there were no means of climbing down.

There were no footprints in the ground around the shed, and the disappearance of Miss Sabrina Smith was as mysterious as ever.

Mrs. Barrett turned the few facts over and over, and before long a tiny suspicion entered her mind that some one had played a trick on her. Just the least little cloud of a suspicion, but the more she thought of it the bigger it grew, and naturally pointed to some one within the school. But who was that one? Few of the girls would dare to attempt such a thing. Not because they lacked the necessary boldness, but because they were not able to control themselves sufficiently. The more Mrs. Barrett thought of the audaciousness of the thing the more furious did she become, and more intent than ever upon punishing the offender, could she be found.

"If it's that Bess Grahame," she exclaimed to Nell, "I'll expel her."

"Why, Aunt Samie, you surely wouldn't do that?" And Nell began to feel a trifle anxious.

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"Why, Aunt Samie, you surely wouldn't do that?" And Nell began to feel a trifle anxious.

"The offence isn't such a terrible one, and besides, you don't know who it is."

"I feel almost sure it is Bess, and she played too many tricks on me last year to get off this time. Look at the impudence of it. I think it is high time something was done if a person cannot advertise in the paper without being tricked. The idea of a minister's daughter, who should be an example for others, to black herself up and——"

"But ministers' daughters are sometimes the worst," interrupted Nell.

"Well, whoever it is, it won't be good for them; and if I don't expel the culprit I will punish her so she won't dare play any more tricks on me."

"Aunt Samie," interposed Nell, "you had better catch your mouse before you kill him."

"Time will tell," answered her aunt, quietly.

Meantime Nell and Mabel kept their own counsel, and did not let even Alice and Lou into their secret. The latter young lady appeared to have no doubts as to the genuineness of Miss Sabrina, but that week when the S. P. C. S. met she announced that she had an original poem to read. The president asked her to stand up, which she did, and, after announcing that her piece could be set to music, Lou cleared her throat and began:

"WHERE?

"AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED TO OUR BELOVED GRAHAME GEM.

"Oh, where, oh, where, has Sabrina Smith gone?
Oh, where, oh, where, can she be?
With her dress cut short and herself cut long,
Oh, where, oh, where, can she be?

Chorus.

"Oh, Briny, Sabrina, oh, Briny, my dear,
Oh, Sabrina Smith, where did you disappear?
We mourn o'er your absence, your flight we deplore,
Come back to our lone hearts again.

"Oh, have you flown off to the wide sunny South
With the quality folks for to live?
Or have you gone back to that mistress so cruel
That but fifty a week did you give?

Chorus.

"Oh, Briny, Sabrina, oh, answer our plea!
Oh, Briny, Sabrina, our hearts call for thee!
Oh, answer us now from your regions of flight,
And tell us whereabouts you are gone!

"You 'poah niggah,' you, I think that I
Can solve the mystery dark,
And so relieve all our suspense
And ease each aching heart.
That wicked Bess Grahame, she's good all the sa-ame,
Has annihilated you.
You rose at her call, at her bidding did fall,
Oh, Sabrina dear, ain't that true?"

As Lou finished she made a low bow, and resumed her seat amid the cheers of her audience. Bess, greatly surprised and very much amused by the poem, leaned back in her chair and laughed until she could laugh no longer.

"Capital!" she cried. "Allow me to congratulate you, Lou. You are smarter than you look."

"Thank you," answered Lou. "Let me reverse the compliment on you."

"That I look smarter than I am? Hum! Well, I always did admire frankness in the young, and I must say that you are doing exceedingly well for one of such tender years."

"Now don't get to sparring, or we'll have to close up the meeting," exclaimed Jocelyn.

"I did not know we had a distinguished poetess in the school," observed Connie from her corner. "But as long as we are burdened with such an illustrious personage, I am glad that she honors the S. P. C. S. with her membership."

"How did you manage, Gem? Tell us all about it," said Letta.

"I must decline with thanks. The less I tell the better it will be for you when you are put upon the witness-stand, with Mrs. Barrett for judge."

"Then she is trying to find out who it was?" said Alice.

"Yes, indeed. She is trying with a vengeance, and I am afraid will be successful; for like the Father of my country, I cannot tell a lie when I am asked, and, from certain rumors afloat, I fear that you and I, girls, will be forced to part."

There was a murmur at this, for Bess's meaning was too plainly understood, and right then and there the girls held an indignation meeting.

To use Nell's expression, Mrs. Barrett did "catch her mouse," and held a miniature trial in her room; but true to their name, the S. P. C. S. flew to the rescue, and, after a great deal of talking, and even crying from some of the girls, the stern judge decided to be lenient, "just this once," and the festive Grahame Gem came out of the fiery furnace with only a singe.

CHAPTER VII.

MERRY CHRISTMAS.

ONE cold, snowy Saturday afternoon, a week before Christmas, a party of eight girls sallied forth from the seminary door and wended their way to the village. It was the S. P. C. S. in full. They were in high spirits, for they were going together to buy Christmas presents for the folks at home.

"Christmas comes but once a year," sang Bess, in an undertone, as they slipped along on the icy pavement.

"I wish it came two or three times," said Connie.

"What an absurd wish!" said Lou. "But then *little* girls never know when they get enough of anything."

"Nor big ones either, sometimes," observed Bess, in a suggestive tone.

A smile went from one face to the other at these words, for it was well known that Lou had made herself sick on a box of candy her fond mother had sent her.

"Say, girls, let's have some fun out of this ex-

pedition. What do you say?" proposed Bess, after a short pause.

"I second that motion," said Alice. "We don't get out together every day in the week, and we may as well have a jolly time when we do get a chance."

"What kind of fun?" asked Connie.

"Oh, just a little innocent amusement that will harm nobody," answered Bess. "I'll start it if the rest of you are afraid to. The first store we will come to is Turner's. I never was in it, but I heard Amy saying that Mr. Turner couldn't understand a word of any language except English. There won't be anything there that we will want to buy, but we'll go in, and I'll talk Dutch to him. Don't any of you girls dare to laugh or let on that you know a word of English. If you do, words cannot describe your fate."

"We won't," answered Nell, laughing, as in her mind's eye she saw the perplexed look of Mr. Turner's face as Bess repeated her jargon to him. The girls were almost convulsed with merriment as they entered the little notion and fancy store, but Bess's face was perfectly composed as she walked up to the counter. The proprietor came blandly forward, rubbing his hands briskly, with a business-like air.

Bess addressed him: "Wir moechten uns einige Weihnachtsgeschenke ansehen."

"Eh?" said Mr. Turner, staring blankly at her.

Bess could scarcely maintain her gravity at the look of bewilderment on the round fat face. She indicated the company of girls with a flourish of both hands.

"Wir kommen alle um Weihnachtsgeschenke zee kaufen."

Poor Mr. Turner looked more blank than ever.

"But I don't understand you," he said.

"Ya," answered Bess, nodding her head. "Ja Weihnachtsgeschenke."

The man was silent, looking at Bess in dismay. Then he turned to Nell, a faint hope beaming on his countenance.

"Do you know what she means?" he asked.

"Ja, sie will etwas kaufen."

With a comical look of perplexity and despair he turned again to Bess, and, putting his fingers to his forehead, shook his head slowly.

"Aber koennen sie nicht verstehen, dass ich etwas kaufen will? Was glauben sie denn fuer was ich gekommen bin?"

"But, madam, I don't understand your language," repeated Mr. Turner again, forgetting that his would-be customer did not (?) know what he was saying.

Bess interrupted him, pouring out a perfect torrent of German; her cheeks red, her eyes shining, both hands going right and left as fast

as possible; and Mr. Turner thinking she was angry, and fearing her wrath might take the form of blows, involuntarily drew back.

"She's a regular wild-cat," he said to himself. "Who knows but what she might take a notion to scratch a fellow's eyes out? Hanged if I know what to do."

But the vexed question was suddenly and unexpectedly settled to his great relief, for Bess wound up her harangue by turning and walking out of the store, followed by the other girls. There was a general shout when they were out of hearing.

"Did you see how scared he looked?" asked Alice. "I thought he was going to have a green fit right there."

"I thought he would collapse when Bess opened fire on him," added Jocelyn.

"He looked so dismayed when he found I talked German too," said Nell.

"Ah, well, poor man!" said Connie, sympathetically. "It was real mean in us. What's the next thing on the carpet, Bess?"

"I move we behave ourselves at the next store," she answered.

"Act as becomes the members of the S. P. C. S.," said Alice.

"Let's have our pictures all taken together," suggested Letta.

"All right," exclaimed Alice, ready for anything that might prove fun. "Say we do."

"Let's do our shopping first," said Nell, "or it will be so dark we can't see what we are buying."

"Then it will be too dark to take the pictures," answered Letta.

"Well, we'll see."

As Nell spoke they came in sight of a low hill, down which some boys and little girls were coasting merrily.

"Hurrah!" cried Bess, as they stopped to watch the healthful sport. "Girls, I'm going down," she added, beckoning a rosy-faced little lad to her.

"Oh, no, don't," said Connie.

"Why not?" demanded Bess.

"Because it's so—so——"

"So unladylike," said Bess, coolly. "Well, perhaps it is; but you can be the lady, and I'll be the little girl. Say, little boy," as he came up, "may I have your sled a while?"

"Yes, ma'am," he answered, handing her the rope to which was attached the gay red runner.

"Thank you," said Bess.

She placed the "Snow Bird" in position, and seated herself upon it.

"Tra-la-la, girls. Constance, my dear, shut your eyes, for I don't want to shock your ladylike nerves by my unladylike actions."

She gave herself a push, and away she sped

down the smooth sloping surface. The little boy ran after her, and the amused group of watchers saw him get on his sled and Bess drag him up the hill.

"I'd be ashamed of myself," said Connie, severely, as the naughty Bess came up, panting with her exertions, but radiant nevertheless.

"Have no doubt of it," she answered, smiling at the stern expression Connie tried to assume.

"Con dear," she added, preparing for another grand coast, "you are not a success in your rôle of propriety, so I wouldn't play it any more if I were you. Try something you are more familiar with." And with a gay laugh the saucy Gem was off once more. She came back with glowing cheeks and bright eyes, and Mabel was persuaded to take her place.

Each girl had her turn at the sport, but when it came to Connie she hung back. Under the combined coaxing of the girls she hesitated a little and finally gave in, consenting to go down once if Bess would pilot her. Bess seated herself on the sled; Connie placed herself behind her, holding on tightly to her companion's waist, and off they started. But alas! alas! the "Snow Bird" struck a stone, and over they went into a small snow-drift. The girls picked themselves up; Bess laughing and jubilant, Connie flushed and indignant.

"I believe you did it on purpose, Bess Grahame!" she exclaimed, almost angrily.

"Don't be a goose," was Bess's answer. "You know better than that, and to prove that I didn't get on, and I'll pull you to the top of the hill again."

Connie hesitated a moment, and then seated herself once more on the sled.

"It will serve her right," she thought, "to make her drag one hundred and ten pounds up a steep hill after upsetting me that way." And Connie smiled as she thought how nicely she would be revenged on Bess.

The latter gathered up the lines again with a sigh, and plod wearily up the hill, Connie all the while chuckling to herself as she imagined what a hard time poor Bess was having. Could she have seen that young lady's face her own would not have been quite so smiling, for it wore anything but a jaded expression, and the eyes sparkled with something that was *not* fatigue. Suddenly Bess gathered all her strength, grasping the rope firmly in both hands, and with a quick movement, entirely unlooked for by Connie, she started off as fast as she could go.

The sudden jerking of the sled pulled it out from under Connie, throwing her head over heels, and, the hill being rather steep, she turned three or four somersaults before she finally stood still, or

lay still, rather, for she was flat on her face, her head towards the foot of the hill.

The girls at the top shouted gleefully at this second mishap, while wicked Bess kept on her course, the sled bumping up and down at her heels, until she reached the brow of the hill. Then she turned around to look after Connie.

"Why, halloo!" she exclaimed. "Where is Con?"

"How can you ask?" said Alice, almost reproachfully, for Connie was her intimate friend. "You had better go back now and help her up," she added, starting down the hill on a run, followed by the others, Bess coasting down. But by this time Connie had struggled to her feet, and was digging the snow from her eyes and ears when the girls came up.

"Where is she?" she demanded, when she could speak.

"Here I am," said Bess, appearing on the scene. "Do you want anything of me?" she added, innocently.

"Do I? I'd like to—to—shake you," sputtered Connie.

"Would you? Well, I'll just give you a receipt to that effect, and we'll consider it settled." And Bess smiled provokingly.

"Bess Grahame, you are too exasperating for anything," said Connie, desperately.

"Am I?" said Bess, calmly.

Connie looked at her for a moment as though she would like to do something desperate, then she burst out laughing.

"You dear old rogue! Let's not quarrel over such a little thing as that. But I would love to have seen myself when I went bouncing down. I believe you started off fast on purpose, Bess."

"Of course I did," answered Bess, composedly. "But I didn't the first time. I thought perhaps a second tumble would cool you off somewhat."

Connie's second tumble certainly *had* cooled her off, for she was in the best of spirits all the afternoon.

The merry party played no more tricks, but hastened to do their shopping, for it was getting late. They rushed around like they were distracted for the next hour, and reached the seminary just in time to hear the bell ring for supper. Of course they were tardy in appearing at the table, and consequently each girl received two black marks.

Christmas-day dawned bright and clear, and the sun peeped cheerfully in at the window of No. 8, as if to wish its occupants a merry Christmas. It shone with a sudden force on Bess's closed eyes, causing her to open them.

"Christmas gift!" she cried, springing out of

bed; but as her bare feet touched the cold floor she gave a little scream and perched herself on the edge of the bed.

"Christmas gift!" she exclaimed again, shaking Mabel, who appeared to be sweetly slumbering, but a perceptible compression of the scarlet mouth proved the contrary.

"Aha, you rogue!" cried Bess. She leaned over and kissed the smooth, pink cheek lightly. "My dear, it's no use to play ''possum' any longer."

"Christmas gift!" cried Mabel, throwing her arm with a sudden movement round Bess's neck and holding her fast.

"Let's hurry up and go down-stairs and see what Kris Kringle brought," said Bess, twining a long, light tress of Mabel's hair around her fingers. "I'll wager he's brought you a big box full of things."

"And I *know* he brought you one," said Mabel.

"Don't be too sure. He didn't put anything in my stocking." And Bess gazed with a mock rueful countenance towards the mantel, where a pair of gray striped hose were suspended.

"I forgot to string mine up, as Lilly says," said Mabel. "There goes the bell. Its very sound seems to say Merry Christmas."

"Your imagination must be on a stretch," answered Bess, "for it says anything but that to me. Listen now: 'You poor girls, you poor girls.'

Hear it? But, by the way, did you ever hear the story of the girl who was in doubt about marrying a certain man?"

"No. What is it?"

"She had a lover named John, and she was undecided about marrying him, so she went to a priest and asked his advice. He told her to listen to the bells at evening, and they would tell her what to do. So she went home, and that evening when the bells began to ring she sat by the window and listened, and the bells seemed to say, 'Marry John, Marry John.' So she married John, and he led her a miserable life. At last she could stand it no longer, and went to the priest again, and he told her to listen to the bells. She did so, and this time they said, 'Don't marry John, don't marry John.'"

"All of which is an illustration of the effects of imagination," said Mabel, smiling. "That girl *imagined* the bells said that."

"And you imagined our bell said Merry Christmas," answered Bess. "If it had been New Year's you would have heard it say Happy New Year. But let's hurry up and catch the other girls," she added, hastening to make her toilet.

"Then we don't have to file down in order today?"

"No. We can go on our heads if we want to," answered Bess.

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They were soon ready and flying down-stairs, knocking at every door on their way, and shouting "Christmas gift" in a manner calculated to be heard by the inmates. In the lower hall about a dozen boxes were standing. The two girls eagerly examined them. One was labelled "Miss Mabel Stewart," and another, "Miss Bess Grahame." There was one for Connie, another for Alice and Lou, and a third for Lucia. A large, heavy-looking one was for Amy. One large package and two smaller ones were directed to Miss Hadley.

"I wonder what's in them," said Bess, curiously. "Looks as though it might be something good."

"I'm dying to know what's in mine," said Mabel, seating herself upon it. "If I only dared." And she made a motion as if to tear off the lid.

"Not until after breakfast," said Bess, shaking her head. "I remember the first Christmas-box I got," she went on; "I was so anxious to know what was in it that I could not eat a bite. I was so anxious that I tried to cut a hole in the box-lid with a penknife, and succeeded only in cutting myself."

"I'm almost tempted to try that experiment with my box," said Mabel, laughing. "I *do* wish I knew what was in it!" she added, sighing disconsolately.

"'There are presents from all from a purse to a toy,'"

sang Bess. "If you only had Fortunatus's wishing-cap now. All necessary would be to put it on and wish, and, presto!"

> "'If wishes were horses, beggars might ride;
> If wishes were fishes, we'd have some fried,'"

sang a merry voice behind them, and turning they beheld Nell.

"A merry Christmas!" she cried, extending a hand to each. "Mabel, judging from your looks, you must be in some sort of a dilemma."

"The poor child is dying of curiosity to know what her Christmas gifts are, and thinks it terrible that she has to wait so long," said Bess.

"Poor girl! If sympathy will do you any good, you have mine. But come in and see what *my* presents are." And Nell led the way into Mrs. Barrett's parlor, followed by the girls. At one end of the room stood an upright piano of polished ebony-wood. In the centre was carved a bust of Mozart. On a chair, near by the instrument, lay a sealskin sacque and cap. Nell indicated them with a wave of her hand.

"There they are. Aren't they lovely?"

A gratified expression appeared on their proud owner's face at the exclamations of surprise that followed this announcement.

"I've always wished for just such a lovely Chickering piano as this," said Nell. "Just listen

to the tone, so rich and full, and yet so sweet." And she played a few bars of a familiar melody. "And there's a sacque and cap exactly like yours, Bess," she went on. "You know I've wanted them ever since I saw yours. Aren't they splendid?"

"Your presents are perfectly lovely," said Bess and Mabel in one breath.

"And I'm almost too happy to live," continued Nell. "One of the dearest wishes of my heart is realized, and my cup of joy is almost running over."

She looked at the girls for a moment, and then suddenly hid her face in her hands. When she looked up again it was with an expression half joy, half sorrow, and her eyes were full of tears.

Bess's eyes sparkled with something besides their natural brilliancy as, putting one hand under Nell's chin, she gently raised her head until the soft blue eyes gazed straight into her own, and said, in tones that caused a fierce pang of jealousy to shoot through Mabel's heart,—

"Little Nell, I hope your dearest wishes may always be realized." And tenderly, almost reverently, she kissed the smiling lips.

Nell clung to her with a half sob, while Mabel, not knowing what to make of this strange, unexpected scene, and with the passionate jealousy leaping into brighter flame every minute, turned and walked away to the window.

"What makes me act so simple?" she questioned of herself. "Surely Bess has a right to have more friends than one, and I have no doubt that she has ever so many of them that she cares more for than she does me. And it is perfectly right, too, that she should not let new friends usurp the old. And didn't Lou tell me that Nell was her most intimate friend? If I go to acting up she won't like me at all, and then I'll wish I had exercised a little common sense. I'll not let anyone see that I am so green and——"

Just as she arrived at this most sensible conclusion the second bell rang, and Bess's voice called her.

All visible traces of emotion were gone when Mabel turned around again, and the three girls went out to breakfast together, seemingly in the best of spirits.

At last breakfast was over, and Mabel, to her surprise and delight, found that her box had been conveyed to her room during her absence. The lid had been loosened, and it took but a few moments to lift it off and stand it against the door.

The first thing that came to light was a pair of scarlet mittens, and a soft, fleecy hood of the same color, knit and sent by Mrs. Stewart. Following these came a splasher and mats of honeycomb canvas, with a design worked in scarlet and gold. These were also from Mabel's mother.

Lilly's presents were a cabinet picture of her own sweet self, arrayed in a wintry costume, standing in the snow, and a handsome autograph album, with "To dear Mabel, from her loving sister," written in straggling characters on the fly-leaf.

Ed's presents were a book, "The Old-Fashioned Girl," and his picture. Dr. Stewart's gift was a pair of gold bracelets and a chain formed of tiny links. Guy's presents also came in the home-box, and were a dozen fine bordered handkerchiefs and a pair of laced kid gloves.

There were several other useful presents, and quite a number of Christmas and New Year's cards from Mabel's St. Louis friends. Below them all was a large pasteboard box filled with popped corn. Another box contained several kinds of home-made candy; then, carefully wrapped up, a large fruit-cake came to view; the bottom of the box was lined with nuts. With little cries of delight Mabel lifted her presents out, and after they had been exclaimed over and admired, Bess, who had very patiently waited all this time, unpacked her treasures.

One of the first things that met her pleased eyes was a lovely necklace of large, clear ambers. It had been a present to Bess's mother from her husband on her sixteenth Christmas, and he now presented it to Bess in honor of her having attained the same number of Yule-times.

One of Bess's presents from her brother Morton was a lovely little work-box of satin-wood well stocked. There were several other presents from father and brother, besides gifts from each member of Amy's family, who lived but a few squares from Bess.

The presents were few among the girls, each one giving to her most intimate friends. Bess's gift to Nell was a pair of satin-covered toilet-bottles and a lovely panel portrait of herself in a frame of scarlet plush. To Mabel she also gave her picture in a blue frame and a very nice volume of "Ivanhoe." Mabel's gift to each was a handsome neckerchief. Nell's gift to Mabel was a lovely little book called the "Yule-log," with fringed and illuminated covers. To Bess she gave a box of fine, tinted note-paper and envelopes.

Presents, of course, were exchanged between Amy and Bess, but it is not necessary to go into any more details. Miss Hadley gave each one of her scholars a Christmas-card, and invited them to her room in the evening, and you may be sure they all went, each one taking nuts, candy, and pop-corn, and the splendid time they had was not soon to be forgotten.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEW-YEAR'S CALLS.

NEW-YEAR'S day arrived. As Mabel rolled up her window-curtain and looked out, disappointment was depicted on her face. Millions of snow-flakes were whirling through the air.

"No skating for us to-day, Bess," she said, turning away from the window.

"Why? Is it snowing?"

"Just as fast as it can."

"Perhaps we can get to go this afternoon," continued Bess.

"I know what we can do," said Mabel. "We can sit at the window and watch the New-Year's callers go by."

"There won't any of us poor girls be so fortunate as to receive calls but you and Amy," said Bess, with a most disconsolate sigh.

"Me? What are you talking about? Who will call on me?"

"Why, your uncle, Mr. Blackmore, of course."

"Mrs. Barrett won't let him see me."

"Yes, she will. If the girls have any relatives

call, they are allowed to receive them, but if any other male biped dares to show the toe of his boot inside these doors, away he goes so quick that he scarcely remembers being here at all."

"Do the teachers ever receive?" asked Mabel.

"Miss Metz received one last year, but that was her betrothed husband. Miss Hadley don't receive, for she knows no one here. The president of the college calls on Mrs. Barrett, and sometimes the girls call on each other; but it's more fun, though, to watch the callers go by. About ten o'clock a whole regiment of college-boys will go along, and we must not miss them for anything."

"Why? Are they such a grand sight?"

"You just wait and we'll have some fun."

Mabel made no answer, but devoutly hoped that Bess was not going to flirt, or do anything equally scandalous.

Ten o'clock found the two girls at their window. The snow-storm had greatly abated, and only a few small flakes drifted lazily through the air. Suddenly the door of the college was thrown wide open, and out came about thirty boys, two abreast. Winding out the college gate, they took the road that led past the seminary. More than one pair of eyes was directed towards Bess's window, and more than one cap was raised cautiously from its owner's head.

"Do you know them?" asked Mabel, glancing a little suspiciously at her friend.

"Why, certainly I do. Do you think I would speak to them if I didn't? See that handsome one with the light hair,—the one that walks so straight. That's Harry Resselburg. His father is a German poet. And that one next to him is Frank Stevenson. His sister Ella came here last year; she is a perfect little beauty."

"She must resemble her brother, then, for he is *very* handsome," remarked Mabel.

"Isn't he?" went on Bess, enthusiastically. "The girls all call him Apollo. Grace Arbut is almost crazy about him. That tall boy next to him is Charley Grant. Oh, Mab, there comes your uncle!"

"Where?" asked Mabel, looking quickly. "That man way off up-street? How do you know it's him?"

"He's got a clerical stride," answered Bess. "After having an ecclesiastical father and an aspiring brother, I think I ought to be pretty well acquainted with the step."

The gentleman came nearer, and sure enough it was Mr. Blackmore. He was gazing intently at the third-story windows. Suddenly a smile illumined his countenance, and he lifted his cap.

"Who is he bowing to?" asked Mabel, flatten-

ing her nose against the window-pane in a vain attempt to see.

"Amy," answered Bess, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Is he in love with her?" demanded Mabel, something in Bess's face prompting her to ask the question.

"I shouldn't wonder," was the concise answer, "as she is in love with him." She added something in a lower tone, that caused Mabel to open her eyes wide with surprise.

"Really? It seems so odd. Think how funny 'Aunt Amy' would sound from me."

"Nevertheless it is so. There goes the door-bell, and the next thing we hear will be Mrs. Barrett's voice calling for Miss Stewart."

A few moments after a knock sounded on the door, followed by Mrs. Barrett's voice. "Miss Mabel, you are wanted down in the parlor."

Mabel took a quick glance at herself in the mirror and hurried down. She found Amy in the parlor entertaining Mr. Blackmore. He rose as Mabel entered, and, wishing her a happy New Year, pushed forward a chair for her. They had been engaged in conversation but a short time, during which Mr. Blackmore told his niece of his engagement to Amy, when the door opened, and Iolanthe entered. She appeared to notice no one but Mabel.

"Ah, here you are!" she cried. "I have been looking all over the houth for you—— Why, Mr. Blackmore!" breaking off suddenly as she saw the young minister for the first (?) time. "You here? I thought we girlth were not allowed to rethieve New-Yearth callth." And she looked up at him with what was intended as a coy smile, but was a most idiotic simper.

"The young ladies are at liberty to receive their relatives," answered Mr. Blackmore, as he courteously offered the girl a chair. "So I have taken occasion to call on my niece, Mabel."

"Ith Mabel your niece?" exclaimed Iolanthe, in surprise; then shaking her finger playfully at Mabel, she continued,—

"Mab, you bad girl, why didn't you tell me that? Don't you know you muthn't have any thecretth from me? No, thank you, Mr. Blackmore; I can't thtay. I would like to, but thtern ruleth forbid," and once more smiling sweetly at the young clergyman, she left the room, having entirely ignored Amy's presence.

That young lady's lips curled scornfully as the door closed behind Iolanthe, and Mr. Blackmore asked, "Is she an intimate friend of yours, Mabel?"

"No, indeed," answered Mabel, with emphasis. "She isn't even a friend, but simply an acquaintance. I don't believe she has a true friend in the whole school."

The clergyman prolonged his stay a good half-hour, and as they bade him good-morning at the hall-door, Amy and Mabel caught sight of a small basket, half filled with cards, tied to a string, which was hanging from one of the second-story windows. Across the road was standing a group of college-boys, looking as demure and innocent as you please.

"Aha! somebody is receiving New-Year's calls," exclaimed Amy, looking upwards. "I'll wager anything that it's Bess."

At this juncture one of the young collegiates, whom Mabel recognized as Harry Resselburg, blew his nose violently, meantime looking skyward. The basket jerked suddenly, and was twitched up out of sight.

The girls closed the door and ran up-stairs quickly, to discover, if possible, who was the daring young lady. But there was no one in sight at any of the upper hall windows. Amy ran on up to her room, and Mabel sat down on the steps, where she could see and not be seen. Patient waiting is no loss, and presently Mabel's vigil was rewarded. The door of No. 8 opened, and Bess's saucy face peered out. Seeing the coast clear, she slipped cautiously into the hall and up to the end window, which she softly opened, and then let down her basket. In a few moments she drew it up again, waving her hand to some one

outside. As she closed the window and started back to her room, Mabel sprang out from her hiding place and caught her.

"Ah, you rogue! Is this the way you do? How dare you? What if it had been Mrs. Barrett instead of me?"

"I suppose I would have to take the consequences; but luckily it was not Mrs. Barrett. Come in now before we are discovered, and I'll show you all my cards."

"Amy said it was you," said Mabel, as they locked their door. "Iolanthe came in the parlor while Uncle Frank was there," she went on, sorting over the cards in Bess's basket.

"She didn't! The goose! Of course she found out that he was here. What did she do?"

Mabel related the little conversation that had taken place.

"She doesn't know it's useless to fish after him," said Bess, with a light laugh. "Ah, well, where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise, so let Iolanthe be blissful while she may. She will be enlightened after a while."

CHAPTER IX.

POOR NELL.

"WHERE is Nell?" asked Alice of Bess, as they came up-stairs together one afternoon after school hours. "I haven't seen her all day."

"She isn't feeling very well," answered Bess. "I was in there during recreation-time, and she had been lying down most all the morning. She felt so very tired, she said. She made me promise to come back as soon as I was through this evening."

"I believe I'll go in with you for a while," said Alice, as they reached their rooms; "that is, if you can wait half a minute."

"A whole one if you wish it," answered Bess, as she entered her own room.

Alice was ready before her time was up, and the two girls went to Nell's room, where they found Mabel. Nell was lying on the lounge. There was nothing so very unusual about her looks, except that her face wore a tired expression and her usually pink cheeks were pale, but that would very naturally be the consequence of the tired, languid feeling. She greeted the girls with

a bright smile, and bade them be seated; but scarcely had they done so when there came a knock at the door, followed by the entrance of Lou and Connie. Both faces wore a frightened look, which quickly gave way to one of relief, as they advanced to Nell's side, and Lou said, in a voice that trembled with fright and excitement,—

"We heard you were terribly sick just now, and it scared us so we couldn't get here quick enough; but I'm glad to see you looking this well."

Nell laughed.

"I must be frightening you all to death," she said. "But there is nothing the matter with me except laziness, and you know that is a disease I am subject to often. Aunt Samie is terribly worried about me, and insists on sending for the doctor; but I only feel very tired, and that is but the result of too much excitement over my Christmas presents. I shall be in school to-morrow."

"If your aunt lets you," interposed Connie.

But, true to her words, Nell was at her place in the school-room the next day; but it soon became evident to those around her that the feeling of languor had not entirely gone away, for she recited her lessons in a listless manner, and seemed greatly relieved when she was through and could sit down again.

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The next day she was absent, and the next;

but Friday morning she was at her desk again. Only until noon, however, when she was forced to remain away, and the next day was not able to arise at all.

Sunday evening, as they were sitting in their room, Mabel said to Bess, who was gazing into the fire in an abstracted manner,—

"Bess, of course I don't know, but don't you think that Nell has the consumption? I had a friend who died with it last winter, and she acted exactly as Nell does. I am no doctor, of course, but I am afraid that is what ails her."

"I know it," answered Bess, "and Nell knows it too. Just the week before Christmas she told me that she had felt a long while that the dread disease was slowly but surely gaining upon her, and that ere long, before the winter was over, in fact, she would have to yield to it. She said she knew it was rebelling against God, but she did not want to die. It was so sweet to live, and she was so young and this world so lovely."

Mabel made no answer, but instantly she thought,—

"That accounts for that little scene on Christmas morning."

Presently she said aloud,—

"It must be hard for her to think that,—to know that she has nothing but death to look forward to. If it were me, I would run and scream,

or do anything to keep from dying. I would fight it down some way."

Bess smiled involuntarily.

"If screaming would save her I am sure Nell would scream with all her might; but she gave right up to die. Her mother and two sisters died of consumption, and she is sure their fate will be hers."

Here a knock sounded on the door, and Connie entered. She came with the message that Nell wanted Bess, and the latter hurried to her room. Nell was unusually nervous and restless that night, first reclining in her chair by the fire, then pacing impatiently up and down the room. Then she would throw herself wearily upon the sofa, but only for a moment, when she would spring up again with a low exclamation, almost of despair.

When Bess entered she was walking rapidly to and fro before the fire, and came to meet her friend with outstretched hands.

"Oh, Bess! I'm so glad you've come. Do tell me something; quick! Oh, I don't want to think! Oh, please tell me something!"

"Why, Nellie dearest!" And, gently forcing the excited girl into a chair, Bess sat down beside her. "Hush, my own, or you will make yourself worse. Where is your aunt?"

"She's gone to send for the doctor, but I don't want him. He can't do me any good. I've got to die, and oh, I don't want to!"

Nell clasped her hands with the cry of one in despair, and burning tears crept slowly down her cheeks. Very tenderly did Bess draw her friend's head to her shoulder and soothe her with low, loving words, all the while stroking the silky hair gently.

Then she recited a funny poem that she had composed, intending to send it to Miss Shrumberger as a valentine, and related one or two amusing incidents of her child-life, thus drawing Nell into momentary forgetfulness of her sorrow.

The doctor arrived shortly after, and gave Nell a sleeping powder, leaving one for morning. The potions did not have the desired effect of sleep, but they caused her to lie in a dull, pleasant stupor, not noticing anybody, for two or three days.

For a week after the effects of the powders wore off Nell was very quiet and solemn, and it was noticed that she read her Bible a great deal, and sat looking out of the window at the distant heavens.

One day she said to Bess,—

"I am willing to die. I have resigned myself to the inevitable; and now that I am satisfied to go I want to die quickly, before I have time to regret my decision. It was hard to give up life, but mamma came to my side the other morning, and told me that I was grieving God by rebelling against his will; that he knew what was best for

me, and I should be content and happy to abide by his decision. I am not afraid to die, for I feel that Jesus is holding my hand and is leading me through the dark valley; but it is all light to me, for he is there, and oh, he is so lovely, Bess! When it is your turn to cross the river, my Bess, you will not be afraid, for you will be with him. Last night I thought I surely must be in heaven. Everything was so light around me, and mamma and sister May stood by me. Oh, it is so lovely over there, Bess!"

Bess was silent, awed by Nell's tone and manner, for she lay back in her chair, her eyes looking upwards, and a face of such peace and love that it seemed as if the rays of divine light were shining down upon her.

There was silence for a short space of time, and Nell continued,—

"You do not know how hard it was to give up life, Bess, and even now I am tempted to murmur. I know it is wicked, but I can't keep the longings back: they will come, and I believe it is natural for a person to cling to life, no matter how resigned they are to death. It is just like some one moving from a house where they have everything comfortable to one where all is grand. No matter how much they want to go to the new home, they will naturally have some love for the old. Don't you think that is it, Bess?"

"My Nellie," said Bess, reverently, "you pure angel, you are a saint on earth, and if any one deserves to enter heaven you do; and I *do* think that is it, Nell. God gave us this life and wants us to love it, and when we are sorry to leave this world it shows that we have enjoyed and appreciated his kind gift. But we know that he has one infinitely grander and greater in store for his redeemed, and you know, my dearest, that however strong may be the spirit the flesh is weak."

"My mother was a true Christian," continued Nell, "and her last words were, 'Oh, Nell, how can I leave you?' She knew she was leaving me all alone with no one but Aunt Samie. She knew how hard it was. Oh, my mother! I thought I should have to live so many long, weary years without you, and now to think that I shall see you so soon! Oh, I wish I was there now!" Bitter tears were falling fast down the pale cheeks, and Bess said gently, kissing the quivering lips,—

"Don't talk any more now, my own. You will worry yourself too much."

"I must talk now, Bess, for after a while I can't, and I want to ask you something. You will think it selfish in me, and I know it is, but—you"— and she hesitated—"will not let any one else *quite* take my place when I am dead? You will save one little corner in your heart for me?"

Bess placed her hand with gentle force over Nell's mouth.

"Nell, don't say another word. I'm almost ashamed of you. You *know* that you fill more than a '*little*' corner of my heart, and no one can ever take your place, for it will *never* be vacant. Death cannot make any difference in my love for you, my Nell; it cannot make it one whit the less strong."

"I know it can't, Bess, and I didn't mean that. We have always been dear friends, and can be still, though one will be on earth and the other in heaven."

After her talk with Bess Nell failed rapidly, daily growing weaker and weaker, until finally she could only speak in a whisper. No one felt a cheering prospect of her recovery. Even Mrs. Barrett, who had been most hopeful from the first, gave up to the inevitable. The sad evidence of her decline threw a gloom over the whole school,—the girls had no heart for studying or anything, for was not one of their best-beloved companions slowly but surely leaving them forever?

Five weeks dragged heavily by, and one afternoon the girls were startled by the appearance at the school-room door of a white-faced servant-girl, who brought an order from Mrs. Barrett that all lessons should cease immediately, for Nell was dying.

The words struck a chill to the heart of each girl, and a feeling of solemnity and awe pervaded them. A feeling such as one has when some one near and dear to them is on the threshold of death.

A few of the girls went directly to Mrs. Barrett's room. Nell turned her eyes towards the door as they entered. She had grown very thin in those weeks of suffering, so thin that her features were scarcely recognizable. She smiled as the girls approached her bedside, and whispered, "You have come to bid me good-by, girls. I never thought to bid you an eternal farewell. Last summer I told you good-by for a while, but now I must tell you good-by forever. It seems so odd to me. I can't realize it, that very soon I shall go away and never come back."

The Rev. Mr. Blackmore entered the room at this moment. He had been sent for at Nell's request, and the girls drew back to make way for the ambassador of that God to whom Nell was hastening.

Sorrowfully and with tear-dimmed eyes they watched for the end to come; but that day passed and the next, and still Nell lingered, but Monday morning brought her young life to its close.

Very few besides Mrs. Barrett were in the room when the pure spirit took its homeward flight. The weeping aunt sat beside the bed,

holding Nell's hand and watching the face on which the death-dews were gathering. Once Nell looked at her, but there was no recognition in the glance.

The clock struck ten, and a slight movement of the dying girl turned the attention of all eyes towards her. Her eyes were open and gazing straight upwards. There was an indescribable expression in their brilliant depths,—an intense look as though they saw something through a veil and were trying to get a clearer view of it.

Mrs. Barrett felt the thin hand relax its hold on hers, and with a low cry of "Nell! Nell! Have you indeed left me?" she buried her face in the pillow.

It was all over at last. The white banner of death fluttered from Mrs. Barrett's door, and the bell tolled forth the sad tidings to the gay, busy world, which went on its way as if one precious soul had not gone to meet its God.

Everything about her funeral Nell had arranged herself. Arrayed in a simple robe of white, with her hair brushed naturally back from her face, she slept peacefully in her rosewood casket. A silver plate on the polished lid bore the inscription,—

ELEANOR,
Aged 16.
Asleep in Jesus.

Wednesday morning the girls took their last farewell of their once bright, happy companion, and Mrs. Barrett, accompanied by Miss Metz, departed with their sacred dead for Cleveland, Nell's childhood's home.

It was a long time before things resumed their usual course at the seminary. The feeling of gloom could not be shaken off, and there was a peculiar sensation of Nell's presence that was very uncomfortable to the timid ones, and even Mabel, who was not at all superstitious, felt afraid to venture out of her room alone after dusk.

A misty, shadowy form seemed to float through the air, and the sound of spirit feet echoed silently through the halls. It so wrought upon Alice's imagination that one night she startled her sister by springing out of bed and screaming, "There she is! There she is! See her in the corner?" and before Lou could reach her she fell over in a faint.

The next morning Lou, who was decidedly *not* a spiritualist, scolded her roundly. She concluded with,—

"And suppose poor Nell *did* come back, Alice. Why need you be afraid of her? She would not hurt you; but she can't come back. Indeed, she don't want to. She is happy in heaven. So free your mind of all such fears as that at once."

But Alice could *not* free her mind of the terrible dread of seeing Nell's spirit, and was in constant terror the whole time. It affected her so much, in spite of Lou's remonstrances and scoldings, that her mother wrote for her to come home, and she very gladly departed.

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CHAPTER X.

VACATION.

THE days went on, lengthening into weeks, and June came. Lessons had begun again with renewed vigor after Mrs. Barrett's return from Cleveland, and the poor girls had scarcely a second when they were not studying or reciting. There was much grumbling among themselves, and some of them complained to Mrs. Barrett, but all the satisfaction they received was, that the course laid down for them must be finished by the end of the term.

Lou reported the state of affairs to Alice, and in return received a long letter from her sister, full of the most glowing descriptions of the good time she was having; a letter that made poor Lou groan within herself. However, with all the hard study, and still harder headaches that naturally followed, a few of the girls were sorry to see the close of the term approach.

Jocelyn and Letta were of this number, and Mabel wondered that they went about with such joyless faces. She herself was half wild with

delight at the thought of seeing the home folks once more.

Bess, after much coaxing, persuaded her to write and ask permission to make her (Bess) a visit during the vacation. After several letters back and forth Mabel gained consent for a visit of one week, and that at the very last of the summer. It was not as long a time as Bess had wished, and Mabel secretly hoped for, but it was better than none, and they were obliged to be satisfied.

The last day of school was almost as busy as the first had been. The girls that were coming back the next term entered their names on the register with those they wished for room-mates. Bess and Mabel were to have their old room: Lou asked for the one next to it. Lucia was not coming back, so Amy registered alone at her old room. Iolanthe, no one knew why, asked for the one directly opposite, and, as none of the girls would room with her, she was forced to be content with her own company. The next day one hack-load after another of merry girls was driven from the seminary to the station, all laughing and talking at once, and each one vying with her neighbor in seeing which voice should be uppermost.

The joyous crowd parted at Lowe-land: those that were not to return sorrowfully, and those

that expected to be together the next school year with many reminders and vague hints as to the fun they would have when they met once more; and when the train came that was to bear them away to their various homes, the laughing, crying set raised such a hue-and-cry as caused the more sedate passengers to stare at them in mild-eyed astonishment. Mabel, Bess, Lou, and Amy travelled together as far as Cincinnati, where they separated; the two former in joyous anticipation of Mabel's promised visit.

Much to Mabel's surprise and delight, her father met her as she stepped off the train. She flew into his arms, and gave him a regular school-girl hug that nearly took his breath away.

"How you have grown!" was the doctor's first exclamation, as he looked at his bright-faced daughter. "Why, you are so tall that your mother will hardly know you."

"Are you glad to see me?" demanded Mabel, knowing well enough that he was.

"Well, some," answered the doctor. "Lil will almost squeeze your neck off when you get home. She has hardly slept a wink for a week, and does nothing all day long but talk of the time 'when Mabel comes home.'"

"The little darling! And dear mamma: I can hardly wait to see her. And Ed and Guy. Oh, it will seem so good to be home again!"

"And yet you want to cut your home-stay short and go off on a visit."

"Now, papa! You know different from that; but I am sure if you knew Bess you would just love her. She is one of the dearest girls the world ever knew, and so cute. You ought to hear some of the things she does. She is just splendid: no other word will express it, and——"

"And Miss Mabel Stewart has fallen headlong in love with her," added Dr. Stewart.

"I don't deny it," said Mabel, somewhat disconcerted; "and you would, too, if you knew her."

"Haven't the least doubt of it; but here we are at the restaurant. Suppose we step in and regale ourselves."

"I'm agreed," answered Mabel. "But do you really think I am anxious to leave you all because I asked to go visiting?" she asked, anxiously. "Because if you do, I will write to Bess and tell her I can't come."

"Have you forgotten how to take a joke? Of course your mother and I don't care. If we did we should not have given our consent to your going. Ed and Lilly are bitterly opposed to any such plan, and Guy had not come home when I left, so I don't know what he will say to it," answered her father, as they entered the dining-room.

"He will say that he wishes he were me, for he

has seen Bess, and thinks she is ever so nice," said Mabel.

Their conversation was interrupted at this point by the appearance of a white-aproned waiter. As they only had a short time in which to eat their lunch and go to the other depot, all further talk was suspended until they were on board the train that was to land them at St. Louis.

It was early the next morning when they reached home. The doctor's carriage was at the depot to meet them, and ere many more minutes had passed Mabel was clasped in her mother's embrace.

Lilly's rapture knew no bounds when she was once more in the arms of her beloved Mabel, and followed close at her side the whole day. As the happy family were gathered in the sitting-room that night, listening to Mabel's recital of her school life, their joy was made complete by the arrival of Guy.

Of course his adventures had to be told and Mabel's begun over again, and both were interrupted by frequent exclamations from their listeners, and sundry hugs and kisses from Lilly. Such a night had never been heard of before in the Stewart family, and it was far into the night, or rather morning, before they retired.

The next morning Lilly was up with the sun, and would have awakened Mabel also, but her mother protested, and the impatient child was

obliged to wait until such time as Mabel chose to make her appearance.

It was fully ten o'clock before she descended the stairs, but she was greeted by the eager Lilly, who was watching anxiously at the foot of them.

Such a delicious home-coming as Mabel had. All her old school-friends called on her the first week of her arrival. She gave them a true school-girl welcome, and treated them at once to a description of the boarding-school.

"Oh, girls!" she exclaimed, "I've had the most fun! I've had to study awful hard, but the fun I have had makes up for it all."

Then she would tell about the S. P. C. S., in which Bess was uppermost, and after recounting some of her tricks to her admiring audience, Mabel would bring out her friend's photograph; and the girls having become interested in her, would crowd around to look at the roguish-faced girl, who looked as if she were laughing at them from the polished pasteboard.

Of course, all of Mabel's accomplishments had to be aired for the benefit of her family. All the new music she had learned had to be played, her French and German rehearsed, and her sketches praised and admired, for under Miss Hadley's instructions Mabel, who really had a talent for drawing, had developed into quite an amateur artist.

The few weeks that remained of her stay at home flew all too fast for the Stewarts, and it was with reluctance that Mabel departed on her visit to Bess. It was quite a tedious journey for the young girl, notwithstanding she had very pleasant company all the way, and Mabel was glad the next afternoon when a long, shrill whistle sounded from the engine, and the brakesman threw open the car door and shouted, "Union City!"

CHAPTER XI.

MABEL GOES VISITING.

As soon as Mabel alighted on the little platform she was seized in a pair of arms and hugged and kissed with girlish enthusiasm, and Bess's voice exclaimed,—

"You dear little Queen Mab! I'm just ever so glad you have come. I was afraid that at the last moment you might decide not to."

Drawing Mabel's arm through her own, Bess escorted her to the other side of the station, where a buggy drawn by a large, magnificent black horse was standing. She assisted Mabel in, and springing in after her, took the lines, and they were soon driving down a wide, sunny street lined with large, imposing-looking stores. They rode along a short distance and then turned to the right. In a few moments more they were at Bess's home.

The parsonage was a cosey white house, with front and side verandas and bay-windows. It set back in the yard, and was shaded by large maple-trees that bordered the pavement. As they drove into the yard the side-door opened, and a

fine, manly-looking boy came out on the porch. Bess introduced him as "my brother Morton." He assisted the girls to alight, and, as they went into the house, Mabel was struck with the peculiar charming appearance of everything. There was nothing grand or magnificent, but there was a certain something about it all that caused Mabel to pronounce it the cosiest place she was ever in.

The room they entered was the living room. Sitting in the wide, square bay-window was an elderly lady with a pleasant face, and gray hair brushed smoothly back under a black lace head-dress. This was the housekeeper, Mrs. Montford.

When Mabel was introduced to her she put up both hands and, drawing the young girl's face down to hers, kissed her, saying as she did so,—

"Excuse me, my dear, but you have such a sweet, innocent face that I feel as if I must give you more than a hand-shake."

Mabel thanked her, a faint blush suffusing her face at the unexpected compliment, and Bess cried,—

"You've hit the nail on the head exactly, Aunt Caroline. I never could tell just what it was in Mab's face that attracted me from the very first, and now you have told me. It is that pure, gentle expression that I never saw in but one

other face." And her voice lowered reverentially as she spoke of that "other face," which for so many days had been sleeping beneath the sod.

Mabel saw instinctively which way her thoughts were tending, and said laughingly, hoping to draw them away from the sad remembrance,—

"I'm really sorry I came, Bess, for you will make me vain. I can't stand so many compliments; I'm not used to them."

"No danger of making you vain," answered Bess, her gay self once more. "You are too sensible for that. But come up-stairs now and refresh yourself, and then I'll present you to the dignitary of the house."

Bess's room was directly over the sitting-room, and was the daintiest little place imaginable. Here, as well as down-stairs, Mabel was impressed with the atmosphere of quiet peace that pervaded everything. In no other house that she had ever visited had she felt the same as she did in this. It was as if the peace of God, that the world cannot give or take away, like a gentle, white-winged dove, had folded its snowy pinions, well content to rest over this blissful abode.

When the girls descended again to the sitting-room, an inviting lunch was spread out on a round table, and Mrs. Montford was waiting to pour tea from a dainty granite teapot. Such a merry time as they had over their repast!

Bess was the same sparkling, vivacious girl that she had been at school, and Mabel, who had been told by a girl jealous of Bess's popularity that she was only trying to be smart, felt convinced now that her gay, sprightly manner was perfectly natural. They were all laughing heartily over an adventure Bess had on her journey home, and which she was reciting for Mabel's benefit, when a door opened, and a tall, rather fleshy man, with a smooth, boyish face, entered the room.

"Here he is!" cried Bess, springing up. "Act one, scene four: Enter the dignitary, and is presented by his dutiful daughter to her most welcome and honored guest. Mabel," taking her friend's hand and leading her forward, "let me make you acquainted with that grand and imposing personage, the Reverend Mr. Grahame; whom you now see before you," she added, with a wave of her hand.

This rather novel introduction was warmly acknowledged by the "dignitary," who took both Mabel's hands in his own, and in a few low words assured her how warm a welcome she had. He had a deep, eloquent voice, that never failed to impress his hearers of his earnestness and sincerity in all that he said, and Mabel felt strangely drawn towards him.

He was just the kind of a man to be Bess's

father, she thought, and she would have associated them together as father and daughter in any place she might have seen them.

Morton, too, was all that Bess's brother should be,—good-humored, a trifle witty, somewhat inclined to tease; as tender-hearted as a girl, but brave, strong, and manly withal, and with an earnest desire underlying all to be a true servant of God. He was peculiarly fond of Bess, and showed his love in many little attentions that a brother seldom bestows upon his sister.

"Miss Mabel," he said to her that evening, as the three were sitting on the porch,—it being Wednesday, Mr. Grahame was at prayer-meeting, —"didn't Bess shock your sense of propriety by some of her outlandish tricks last winter?"

Before Mabel could reply, Bess intervened,—

"I didn't do any outlandish tricks last winter. I was an honor to my family, but year before that I cut up so that I was almost ashamed of myself. I got ten black marks in one week; two more the same week would have expelled me, but as luck happened I didn't get those two."

"What did you do?" asked Mabel, curiously.

"Oh, I'll tell you some time. It isn't best to repeat it before young, innocent ears like Mort's. It might injure his morals, and then I'd be responsible. See?"

"I see," answered Mabel, laughing.

"But you tell Mabel some of *your* tricks, Mort," continued Bess. "Tell her about 'dear Evelina.'"

"I'm afraid such a recital would be dangerous, as it might demoralize you," said her brother, wickedly.

"You can't drown a fish in water, and you can't demoralize demoralization; so spin away, Morty, and don't be afraid of entangling *me* in your yarn," was the answer.

"Yes, do tell it," said Mabel. "I love to hear of college fun."

Thus exhorted, Morton obeyed; and, settling himself for the task, he began:

"The principal of our college is a minister, but nevertheless he thinks that what he don't know no one else does. He's a very timid man also, and we boys have some jolly times playing tricks on him. One day he got very angry at us fellows, and all for nothing, too——"

"I suppose it was nothing," interrupted Bess.

"And he gave us such a tongue-lashing as was never heard before or since," continued the narrator, "and we determined to be even with him; so that night at supper four of the boys broke the rules.

"They knew, of course, that Granny Gray, as we call him, would make them 'sweat' after tea. We had it all arranged beforehand; so while Granny

was lecturing away with all his might in his office, Jack Strong, my room-mate, and I sneaked around to the school-room closet, where the skeleton was kept. The boys call it the 'Gov'nor.'

"We took it down, and crept up-stairs as cautiously as we could, all the time shaking in our boots for fear of being discovered. Every once in a while, in spite of us, the old Gov'nor's foot would hit the stairs, and then he would rattle all over; but at last we got him safely into the doctor's room, where Jack wrapped a sheet around him; I tied a night-cap on his head, pulling it over so as to shade the face, and we bundled him into bed.

"We propped him up with the pillow to a sitting posture, and the dry, bony hands we clasped over the quilt. Then we crept away to our room and awaited results. They were not very long in coming, as every one had to be in bed by ten o'clock, and pretty soon we heard the doctor ascending the stairs, puffing and blowing like a porpoise. He is a very fleshy man, and being mad, puffed worse than ever. Jack said to me, 'There comes the whale, Mort; now for some fun.'"

"You forgot to say that the doctor is a widower and a spiritualist," interrupted Bess again.

"Oh, to be sure! Well, his wife was a perfect virago, and before she died she told the doctor that if he ever dared to even go with another woman

she'd haunt him. But in spite of this awful threat for some months past the doctor had been acting rather 'spooney' on Miss Isabella Steele, the principal of the seminary next to the college. She is a thin, angular old maid, languishing and dreamy, and was very fond of getting suddenly frightened, and fainting, when the doctor was around. But to go back to the fun. We heard Granny enter his room, and waited patiently.

"It was a moonlight night, and the rays shone almost directly in the doctor's window, making the figure in the bed look more ghastly than ever. Our room was next to his, and, from the sounds that proceeded therefrom, we judged that Granny had gone down on his knees. We couldn't see, but all the same we enjoyed it immensely. We heard Granny give a frightened groan, and then he began to plead as well as he could, for his teeth chattered so we could hear them, and he always stammered a little.

"'Oh, Evelina! d-dear Evelina! I do-on't g-g-go with any b-b-bo-ody; inde-e-ed, I don't. I-I-I ha-a-te that Miss S-S-St-e-ele, indeed, I do. She is an u-u-ug-g-ly o-o-o-old m-m-m-ma-a-id. I-I- o-o-nly t-t-t-alk to he-er b-b-be-e-cause I am so-so lone-so-ome after you, dear Ev-Evelina. Indeed, tha-tha-that's the-the-the t-truth, Ev-oh, Evelina! Oh, Lord! save me!' And screech-

ing worse than a woman, the frightened doctor came rolling and tumbling out of his room and down-stairs as fast as he could run, or tumble rather, for he bounced up and down like a rubber ball.

"As soon as he reached the lower hall, Jack and I sprang out of our room and into the doctor's, where we jerked 'dear Evelina' from the bed in a twinkling, hurriedly arranged the covers, and went back to our room, threw the skeleton in the closet, locked the door, and hid the key.

"All this was done in a moment's time, and then we went rushing out in the hall, looking as wild and scared as we could under the circumstances. The hall was lined with boys, who, of course, knew what the matter was, and enjoyed the joke as hugely as Jack and I.

"In a few minutes all the teachers came rushing up, followed by the trembling doctor, who kept a safe distance in the rear. He had positively declared to them that he had seen his departed wife sitting up in his bed. Dr. Wilson, the head of the college, was in the lead of the procession, each one of which carried a candle.

"He looked at us sternly. 'What does this mean?' he thundered. Ed Ornay acted as spokesman for the party. His version of the story seemed to be satisfactory, but the doctor scanned our

faces closely, and questioned one or two others, but their report was but a repetition of Ed's.

"Dr. Wilson then opened Granny's door, and the haunted husband cowered back, shaking as if he had the ague. Dr. Wilson looked around the room, and then said, 'Why, there is nothing here.' At that Dr. Gray got a little bolder, and advanced a step or two nearer. Dr. Wilson couldn't help smiling when he saw how frightened the man really was, but he said,—

"'If it was a ghost you saw, and I don't believe it was, it has entirely disappeared!'

"So the doctor managed to step inside the room, and a look of astonishment spread slowly over his face.

"'Well, there *was* something here,' he said. 'Wasn't there?' appealing to the boys.

"'We didn't see anything,' said Ed. 'We heard you running down-stairs, and thought perhaps there were burglars in your room. So we looked, and found it just like it is now.'

"Granny looked more astonished than ever, but said nothing. Dr. Wilson ordered us all to our rooms, and we went, but not to sleep; at least not Jack and I. About one or two o'clock, when we were sure that every one in the house was asleep, we took 'dear Evelina' back to her closet, and from that day to this our trick has never been found out."

Bess and Mabel were in fits of laughter when this narrative was concluded.

"What boys! what boys!" cried Mabel. "And did the doctor stop going with the old maid?"

"You may be sure he did. He doesn't as much as even look at her any more."

The arrival of Mr Grahame put a stop to all further conversation on the subject, and after family worship, in which the servant-girl joined, they retired to their respective rooms for the night.

CHAPTER XII.

AN ADVENTURE.

THE next morning as the trio were enjoying themselves at archery out under the trees, a merry voice called out,—

"Good-morning. Who is the winner?" and looking up, they beheld a gray pony coming up the drive, bearing on his back a young girl with a face of almost lily whiteness, relieved only by the vivid scarlet lips and intense blackness of her eyes.

"Good-morning," answered Bess, gayly. "Can you ask who is the winner when you have heard of my fame as an archer, and the many triumphs I have achieved?" she added, with mock reproach.

"I beg your pardon," returned the young equestrienne, humbly; "I am so thoughtless."

She drew up at Bess's side, and was introduced to Mabel as "Miss Grace Long." Then she continued to Bess,—

"I forgot about your friend coming, and came up to ask you to go riding. You can both go now, can't you?"

"Why, certainly. Get down and have a game with Mort while Mab and I don our habiliments."

She beckoned to Mabel, and they disappeared into the house, while Grace descended from her steed and entered into quite a lively contest with Morton. In about fifteen minutes Bess and Mabel reappeared, clad in their riding-habits. The horses were soon brought around, and the gay party mounted.

"I feel highly insulted that you didn't ask me to go, too, Grace," said Morton, walking by her side, as they rode slowly out of the yard.

"Do you? I'm sorry; won't you go?"

"Most certainly not when I have to ask for an invitation," he returned, in the same bantering tone as before; then he added, more seriously, "I have some errands to execute for father this morning. I should like very much to gallant you ladies around the country, but pleasure before duty is my motto."

He laughed at the discomfited flush that rose to Grace's face. She pronounced him a "horrid tease," and without any more ado the "cavalcade," as Morton jokingly called them, started off. They cantered briskly along, and soon came in sight of a large, handsome brick house.

"That is Amy's home," said Bess to Mabel.

Amy herself was sitting out under the trees

reading, with three bright-faced children gathered around her. She looked up as she heard the sound of horses' feet, and seeing Mabel, greeted her with smiling cordiality. They lingered chatting but a moment, and as they came out into the more open country Bess proposed a race.

"Agreed!" cried Grace and Mabel, and off they started on quite a lively trot. Bess, who was an accomplished horsewoman, far out-distanced her competitors. She drew up flushed and breathless at the goal, and waited for them to come up.

"You are not a bit fair," cried Grace, reining in her pony; "you went like the wind; but your horse is the biggest, and you *ought* to win."

"I don't see why. The smaller the horse the faster he ought to go, because he has less of himself to carry," answered Bess.

"Well, we won't fight a duel about it," said Grace. "But while our horses are resting suppose we explore that wood yonder."

"Rash girl!" exclaimed Bess. "Don't you know the dangers that lurk in woods, to catch unsuspecting females, like a lion waiting for his prey? Would you, knowing all this, dare to lure two young innocents like Mab and I in——"

"Oh, what nonsense!" interrupted Grace. "Will you, or will you not? that is the question," she added, tragically.

"We will," answered Bess, solemnly. "And

whatever happens, remember that I gave you fair warning."

"Are you afraid?" And Grace turned to Mabel.

"I'm afraid of *nothing*," she answered, a touch of contempt in her tones.

"Brave girl; come on, then." And Grace started off, followed by the others. The woods indicated were but a short distance away, and were separated from the road by a worm-fence, as Grace called it. Dismounting, they tied their horses and entered the woods. They were quite dense, so that scarcely a ray of sunlight penetrated the thick foliage. There were few flowers to be found, those being mostly violets; so the flower search was soon given up, and Grace, reluctant to return to the horses so soon, suggested that they decorate Mabel with flowers and leaves as a queen, and then ride into B——, a straggling village three miles farther on, as a band of gypsies telling fortunes. The others consented, and they proceeded to the decorating process.

"Gypsies don't have such pale faces," remarked the prospective queen.

"Nor such gold hair," added Bess, dexterously twining a few violets among Mabel's burnished braids.

"Oh, we can tell them we've come a long ways without anything to eat, and that will account for our paleness," said Grace.

"I'm dark enough, anyway," went on Bess. "They will think you two were stolen in your infancy."

"They won't think of suspecting deception in whatever we tell them," continued Grace, "for they don't look as if they had half sense."

"Mab looks shocked at your impoliteness, Grace," said Bess. "Do make her *think*, at least, that you have had good breeding."

"When she sees one of the B—ites she will see the truth of my assertion," answered Grace, not at all abashed.

Silence reigned for a few moments, when suddenly Bess exclaimed,—

"Oh, girls! way back there I see a bush that is just glowing scarlet with flowers or something. I'll go and gather some of it, while you two go in some other direction and see what you can find; and if either one thinks she is getting too far from the others, just call and the other two will answer. In that way we can't get lost."

"There isn't any danger of our getting lost in *these* woods, anyway," said Grace, "for they are not deep or dark enough."

However, Bess's plan was an admirable one, and the three girls wandered off in different parts of the wood, frequently calling to each other, and receiving an answering halloo, which occasionally sounded rather faint, as though the hallooer were

getting farther and farther away from her companions.

Mabel, engrossed with thoughts of her visit, very carelessly wandered on deeper and deeper into the heart of the woods. So occupied was she that she forgot her search for flowers, but strayed along, her eyes bent intently upon the ground. Suddenly a slight noise at her feet caused her to stop. A small, flat head dotted with two gleaming eyes met her view.

"Snakes!" she exclaimed, darting away from the spot. Aroused now to a sense of her surroundings,—for she had forgotten for the time where she was,—she paused a moment to look around her. Nothing on either side could she see but trees. All was still as the grave. Mabel began to grow frightened. "Where are the girls?" she thought. "I have not heard them call for a long while. I had better try to find my way back."

But which way had she come? That was something Mabel could not determine, but with many misgivings she retraced her steps a few yards and then stopped. She seemed to have gone wide of her mark. "Perhaps I had better call," she said to herself, and the next moment her voice rang out, "Bess! Bess! where are you?" There was no answer, and Mabel called again. The silence that reigned seemed to mock her, and

her voice sounded strangely loud and unnatural. Taking in a long breath, she gave vent to a shrill scream.

"B—e—ss!" But Bess was as deaf to the call as though the earth had opened and swallowed her up. A sudden terror seized Mabel, and her heart almost stood still. She was lost!

"Oh! what shall I do?" she unconsciously exclaimed aloud. Almost instantaneously there was a rustling at her side: the branches of a thick clump of low, scrubby maples parted, and a hideous black face, cut and scarred with ghastly red seams, looked through at her with a disgusting, drunken leer, and a wheedling, drawling voice said,—

"Ah, my pretty gold-haired gypsy, did you call for me? I have been waiting for you a long while, and was afraid you were not coming. Come here, little darling, and lay your head upon my breast." And, with another maudlin leer, he reached forth his great black hand to take hers.

The color faded from Mabel's face, leaving it deathly white, and, with a shriek of wild terror, she turned and fled precipitately, she knew not, cared not where, while the man, a big, burly negro, went crashing after her.

Poor Mabel, almost frightened out of her senses, flew as if her feet had wings; but her progress was somewhat retarded by contact with the vari-

ous trees in her way, which she, in her blind haste, would bump against with a force almost sufficient to knock her down.

"Oh, God! help me to get away," she prayed. "If ever I get out of here alive, I'll *never* be so silly as to go in the woods again."

Never stopping to look back, she plunged headlong over logs and into swamps. Her hat was gone; her riding-habit, which had been tucked up, became loosened from its fastenings, and caught in her feet, tripping her up, but she held it up in one hand as best she could. Some of the garlands, which still clung to her hair, fell over her eyes, but she tore them desperately away and dashed on.

How long she kept up this frantic race Mabel did not know, but she was finally forced to stop from sheer exhaustion. She listened intently, but there was no sound of pursuing footsteps, and, with a sigh of relief, she dropped panting against a tree. But she dared not remain there a longer time than was necessary to decide which way to go next. A faint white streak, away off to the right, decided her, and with a quick glance around, to see if the negro was in sight, Mabel ran quickly towards her goal. It was reached at last, and, with a silent prayer of thankfulness, she emerged from the woods.

Now that she was safe for the time being, Ma-

bel stopped to look around her. Her heart was beating like a trip-hammer, her head ached from the knocks it had received, her face and hands were scratched and bleeding from contact with the many thorns and brier-bushes that had obstructed her path. Her habit was torn and soiled, and her hair—the hair-pins having been shaken out of it by her vigorous exercise—was hanging half unbraided down her back.

Her first thought was, "How will I get home again?" She had not the least thought of trying to find her way back to the girls, for she was afraid to enter the woods a second time. But which direction should she take to reach home?

Mabel looked up and down the road in bewilderment. It was not the road they had come up that morning. She was sure of that, but, whichever direction she might take, she surely could not fall into greater danger than that from which she had just escaped, and so, having rested quite long enough, Mabel started on once more, though at not so rapid a pace as her former one.

She soon passed beyond the woods and out into the open country. Wide pasture-lands stretched away on either side. In one or two of them cattle and horses were grazing, and Mabel felt sure that there must be a house close by. What was her joy, as she approached nearer, to see a man digging a trench in one of the lots.

Without the slightest hesitation she stepped aside from the road, climbed the fence that surrounded the field, and confidently approached the farmer. He looked up as the somewhat dilapidated young lady advanced towards him, and astonishment spread slowly over his face.

He was rather a rough-looking man, with shaggy black whiskers and hair, but his deep-set blue eyes beamed kindly from beneath their heavy brows. He listened patiently while Mabel told her story and asked for aid, and then replied, in a gruff though not unpleasant voice,—

"Well, little girl, I'm sorry for you, but I don't know any preacher named Grahame, as I haven't been living in these parts very long. However, I'll hitch up my team and drive you into town, and then we can inquire our way along."

"Oh, thank you!" exclaimed Mabel, laughing from very joy. "You're *ever* so kind, and I'm sure I *never* can thank you enough. My friends will be so worried when they find I am lost."

"You must come to my house first and have some dinner," went on the man, as the ringing of a bell came to them faintly across the fields. "It won't take much longer," he added, as he saw a denial on Mabel's face. "Besides, my horses will have to be fed before *they* can go, and you may as well eat while you are waiting."

And Mabel was obliged to be content, feeling

thankful that she had secured any help at all. It was fully half a mile across-lots to the farmer's house, and when he arrived with Mabel, crowned with his big straw hat, his wife and three rosy-cheeked daughters crowded to the door in undisguised amazement.

When Mabel's situation was explained to them they bustled around to dish up the dinner, that she might get off as quickly as possible, and while they were thus engaged one of the buxom girls took Mabel to her bedroom, where that young lady arranged her toilet as well as she could.

She was in an agony of suspense all the while they were at dinner as she observed the slowness of the farmer's movements, but at last, to her great relief, he was through and went out to hitch up. As the two-horse team lumbered along over the rough country road, Mabel became fearful lest they were going the wrong way. "Did you understand when I told you I was staying in Union?" she finally asked.

"Yes," answered the man, quite undisturbed by her anxiety, "and this road leads right there. I'm going to take you down by the post-office; that is the best place to inquire for anybody, for the postmaster is always sure to know."

Mabel asked no more questions, feeling satisfied that she was all right, and they jogged along as fast as two lazy, fat horses could be made to go.

CHAPTER XIII.

JOY ONCE MORE.

MEANWHILE, after the girls separated from each other, Grace wandered around gathering flowers until, becoming tired, she decided to go back to the edge of the woods to rest, and wait until the others came up. She seated herself on the fence beside her pony, and decorated his head and neck with the violets and ferns she had found. While she was thus busily engaged Bess appeared.

"Hurrah!" she cried, smiling at sight of the flower-trimmed pony. Then she went on, to Grace: "I'm glad you are here, for it's time to go home. Why, hasn't Mab come yet?"

"I haven't seen her," answered Grace, complacently. "I haven't heard her call for some time, so I guess she's not very far. She'd be apt to let us know if she thought she was getting lost."

Grace's last words caused Bess to feel a trifle uneasy. She gave no sign, however, but simply said,—

"We'll wait here a few moments, and if she doesn't come, I'll call her."

The few moments went by, and Bess said, "She surely ought to be here by this time."

Grace looked up quickly.

"Do you think anything has happened to her?" she asked.

"I hope not," was Bess's answer. "We had better call her, Grace."

So both girls called as loud as they could, but there was no answering call. They waited a few moments, and then Bess's voice, loud and clear as a clarion note, rang out, "Mabel! where are you? Answer me!"

Not a sound came in reply, and Grace said, with paling cheeks, "Let us go in farther, Bess. She may have wandered away back and can't hear us."

So, clasping hands, the girls ventured farther into the woods. The place had an air of solemnity and awe-fulness about it now that made Grace shrink back, and even Bess's brave heart quailed as they entered. Once more they stopped and called. Again and still again, but all with the same answer,—silence.

"Perhaps she hears, but is playing us a trick," suggested Grace.

But Bess quickly dispelled any such idea. "Mab would not do such a thing," she said, so emphatically that Grace was convinced.

"Then where is she? Why don't she answer

us? Oh, Bess! do you suppose anything has happened to her?"

Bess's face was perfectly calm, but her mind was in a tumult.

"What if anything has happened to her?" she thought. "What would I do? I could never forgive myself."

Aloud, she said to Grace, who was beginning to tremble like a leaf,—

"We must look for her, Grace. She is in the woods, I have no doubt, so don't you go to getting excited and fainting, and she'll come out all right."

"Do you really think so? Do you think we will find her?" asked Grace, who was nervous and excitable, and liable to faint on occasions like this.

"Of course we will," answered Bess, cheerfully.

They went along for a short distance, at various intervals calling Mabel; but no Mabel answered them. Finally Bess stood still.

"It's of no use to go any farther, Grace; we can never find Mabel alone. These woods are quite deep, and she may have strayed into the very heart of them. We'll go back, and you stay there by the horses, so if Mab should come she won't be frightened to death by not finding anybody, and I'll go home for help."

"Let us wait a while and perhaps she will come," said Grace, who was loath to be left alone.

"We might wait an hour and she wouldn't come, so there is no use to lose any more time," Bess answered, wisely.

"But I'm afraid," acknowledged Grace.

"Nonsense! You are not afraid with your horse by you? You could mount and away at the least approach of danger."

They hurriedly retraced their steps, and Bess untied her horse.

"Keep up a brave heart, Grace," she said, as she mounted, "and we'll come out with colors flying. Good-by," and she waved her hand to Grace as she rode away. She did not tell her of the fears she entertained as to Mabel's safety, but Grace instinctively felt them.

"How self-controlled Bess is!" she thought to herself, as she was left alone. "I know she is awfully frightened about Mabel, but she acts as calm as if nothing had happened."

Once out of Grace's sight, Bess urged her horse to its utmost speed. She felt that every moment was precious, and if anything had happened to Mabel, it had been brought about by her (Bess's) carelessness, and she would beyond her own and everybody else's forgiveness. With these thoughts filling her mind she dashed on, and Hercules, large, powerful horse though he was, was covered

with foam by the time his rider turned him into her own yard.

"Where is pa?" she demanded of Morton, who came out to meet her.

"He's out calling; but what on earth is the matter? Hercules looks as if he had been standing in soap-suds. Where are the girls?"

In a very few words Bess explained the situation of things. Mort, boy-like, gave a long whistle, and then seizing his cap from a stand near by, and shouting something to Bess, dashed up the street in the direction of Amy's.

Bess, after explaining to Mrs. Montford, who anxiously asked the cause of the trouble, followed him, though at a more leisurely pace, for Hercules was panting heavily with his exertions. As she reached her uncle's gate, Morton came out on horseback followed by Ferdinand (Amy's brother), also mounted.

"Don't you come, Bess. You stay here at Amy's," called back Morton.

"Long enough to get a fresh horse," was Bess's answer.

"You had better stay, Bess," said Ferdinand. "We will obtain help from Farmer Clark's boys, and I promise you to come back in half an hour and report our progress."

"I won't promise, for I feel as if I could fly there."

"We will do the best we can," went on her cousin. "So make your mind easy."

He galloped after Morton, and, dismounting from Hercules, Bess entered the house. The family were just sitting down to dinner, and Amy prevailed upon her cousin to partake of some refreshment. But Bess was determined to go back, and if not help search for Mabel, at least to remain there until she was found; so, after swallowing a few mouthfuls, she took Amy's pony and departed. When she was half-way to the woods she met Grace on her way home.

"They wouldn't let me stay," she said, plaintively, reining up her horse. "No, they have not found her yet," in answer to Bess's eager inquiry. "I'm going back with you," she went on, wheeling her pony around. "Oh, Bess! it was dreadful, staying there all alone. You have no idea; and I thought you never *would* come. I was almost too frightened to look up when Morton called me."

"I hurried as quickly as I possibly could," said Bess, "and it seemed to me that the distance home increased with every mile I rode."

"I wonder how she happened to get lost?" continued Grace, musingly.

"Let us not talk of it now, Grace," interrupted Bess, quickly. "My head is fairly whirling with the thought."

"I know it is," answered Grace, sympathetically. "And it is a wonder to me how you control yourself so well."

Nothing more was said until they reached the woods. The pony Mabel had ridden was still hitched to the fence with the two others.

"Morton said to let it stay there, so Miss Stewart could ride it home when she was found," explained Grace.

As the girls drew up by the side of the steeds, Mort came out of the woods. His face wore a discouraged, disturbed look, but it vanished at sight of the girls.

"Not yet," he said, in answer to a look from his sister. "But we stumbled on this by an old log." And he held up to view Mabel's hat. He did not add that they had also stumbled upon a drunken negro lying close to the spot where the hat had been found.

"Can't we help you any?" asked Bess, as she took the crushed, shapeless little hat from her brother.

"No; Frank Clark and his brother are helping, and they are quite sufficient. You and Grace had better go home now and stay until we come, which we hope to do soon, bringing Mabel with us."

"We will ride on up the road," said Bess. "Perhaps we may see something of her."

"Just as you like," answered Morton, as he returned to his search.

But a mile's ride up the road proved fruitless as far as its object was concerned, and, faint-hearted and weary, the girls were obliged to give it up and go home, as Morton had advised. Bess stopped at Amy's to get her own horse again, and, after leaving Grace at her home, rode slowly along.

She felt discouraged and disconsolate, but hope still burned, though feebly, in her bosom,—hope of finding Mabel; but, alas! how might they find her? Wounded, dying, perhaps dead, and all through the thoughtlessness of one who loved her. All these thoughts thronged through Bess's mind as she jogged on, still holding on to the dilapidated hat.

As she neared home she discovered her father standing on the porch, and the girl's heart sunk within her. But Mr. Grahame appeared to be in utter ignorance of the sad occurrence, for he was smiling as serenely as ever, and as Bess rode into the yard he came up to assist her to alight.

"Oh, papa," she cried, flinging herself from the saddle into his arms, "do you know?"

"Know what?" asked the reverend gentleman, and his voice betokened no anxiety.

"That Mab is lost and through my carelessness," answered Bess, her voice almost a sob.

To her great surprise her father did not appear to be at all startled by such information.

"I have heard it all," he answered, calmly, "and from the very best of authority."

Bess raised her head and looked at him in perfect astonishment. Suddenly a gleam of light darted through her mind. "Papa," she exclaimed, looking him straight in the face, "who told you?"

"The heroine of the great tragedy herself," he answered.

A glad cry sounded behind them, flying feet came over the grass, and, before she could collect her senses sufficiently to think, Bess felt herself encircled by two arms, and a soft cheek was laid against her own.

"Bess! dear Bess!" cried Mabel's voice, full of joy and thankfulness.

Bess did not speak. It seemed as if a mountain had been suddenly lifted from her mind, though for a moment she almost doubted her own eyes and ears. But no, it was true; Mabel's eyes, filled with happy tears, were gazing into her own, and Mabel's voice sounded in such exulting accents she could scarcely articulate.

Bess's first words were, "Papa, please send word right away to Mort and the others."

"A messenger went from me just before you came," answered her father. "But do not stand here all afternoon staring at Mabel as though you

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"A messenger went from me just before you came," answered her father. "But do not stand here all afternoon staring at Mabel as though you

were not quite convinced that she was flesh and blood. Lunch is waiting in the dining-room, and that naughty girl there would not eat a bite until you came. When I came back from my calls I found her walking up and down the yard like a caged lioness. She pounced upon me at once, and I was terribly frightened for a moment, not knowing what cannibalistic designs she might have on me."

Mrs. Montford appeared at the door at this juncture, and gave them an urgent request to "come right in to dinner," as it was fast getting cold.

The joy and relief of the anxious searchers, when they heard that Mabel was safe at home, can scarcely be realized. As for Grace, when she received the glad news she hardly waited to don her hat, so eager was she to see the heroine of such an adventure.

Of course explanations were heard on both sides, and many were the conjectures as to the whys and wherefores of it all. Mabel's story, being the most important, had to be told over and over again before her little crowd of excited listeners would be satisfied, and it was the subject of three girls' dreams that night.

Saturday morning a gay party was gathered at the Rev. Mr. Grahame's. It consisted of Grace, Ferdinand, Amy and her three little sisters, Edna

Earle, Bess's next-door neighbor, May, Arthur, and Will Thornton. The latter-named young man was a student at West Point, and the bold aspirant to military honors was very much taken with Mabel. They were all bound for Fernbank, a place some six or eight miles up the railroad, to have a picnic.

Art Thornton, a fat, round-faced boy of sixteen, declared himself "completely tired out" with the walk from his house to the parsonage, and did not know how he could possibly "foot it" to the station.

"Poor little boy!" said Morton, compassionately. "Perhaps you had better not attempt to go at all."

Arthur deigned him no answer, and at a quarter-past eight the party started for the station, with a great deal of talking and laughing that was of no earthly use except to make a noise; and Bess's voice above all the rest, saying, or rather shouting, something about being sure that they had plenty of umbrellas in case of rain, and quoits and shawls for fear the ground might be damp.

"*Quoits* are *splendid* to protect the feet from the damp grass," remarked Edna, sarcastically.

"I said *shawls*," answered Bess.

"Well, you mixed it up so nobody could tell just what you *did* say."

"Well, if you would all listen to me instead of

cackling like so many geese, perhaps you *could* tell," retorted Bess.

"Birds in their little nests agree,"

sang a voice from the rear of the party.

"If we meet any one strange, what will they think we are?" interrupted May.

"They won't be apt to think we are a funeral," answered Art.

"They would be more apt to think we were crazy lunatics," said Grace.

"*Crazy* lunatics, Grace?" said Will, who was walking with her.

"Oh, you! I guess you had vinegar tea for your breakfast."

"Not at all; but you know when you are in the company of smart people you can't help being smart also."

Grace looked at him a minute, and then stepped back with Art.

"I'm afraid to walk with you any longer," she said. "You don't act one bit natural this morning."

There was a shout at this, and Grace looked triumphant.

"What have you got in that bundle, Mort?" asked Will, after they had gone on for about half a minute in silence.

"Never mind what. You'll find out soon enough," was Morton's answer.

"Oh, tell us what it is, Morty," chimed in Bess, seeing the queer-shaped package for the first time.

"Now, Eve," said her brother, teasingly.

"Well, you might tell *me*," she answered.

"I *might* do a great many things," was the satisfactory (?) reply.

"Let's tell riddles," proposed Edna.

"All right!" cried Bess, quickly. "I'll begin: it goes around this way. Morton, what's in that bundle?"

"Give it up," answered Morton, promptly, with a sly wink at Will. "Ha! ha! Bess: caught! *You'd* better give it up too now."

"Ah, now," said Bess, pretending to pout, "I wouldn't be that mean for a fortune."

"Did you bring your bat, Mort?" asked Art.

"Yes; but we don't suppose you will care to play, as it would make you too tired."

"Oh, of course not. I merely wanted to make sure you had it."

They came in sight of the station as he spoke, and as they ascended the steps to the platform a whistle was heard in the near distance, and in a few moments the train came puffing up. In the excitement of getting on Grace forgot her lunch-basket, which she very thoughtlessly had de-

posited in the door of the waiting-room. She made a great ado over her loss when it was discovered.

"It had cake in it, too," she said, pretending to cry.

"It is too bad, Grace," said Bess, sympathetically, "for I know cake is a luxury with you, but I brought an extra piece along, and you may have that."

"Well," said Grace, meekly, wiping her tearful (?) eyes, while a broad smile appeared on the faces of the passengers, who concluded that Grace had never been very far outside of her own town.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MERRY PICNICKERS.

At last the merry party reached their destination, and as they alighted at the little country station, they looked eagerly around for a cool, shady place. Two roads lay before them: one to the right and the other to the left.

"There is a splendid place up this way," said Bess, pointing to the right, where the road led past a delightful grove.

"There's the best place up *there*," said Morton, indicating a stretch of woods towards the left.

"Well, *you* can go there," answered his sister. "All the others will go with me."

"*I* won't," said May, going over to Morton's side.

"Well, what is our gain will be his loss, so come on, my gallant army." And Bess started up the road, followed by all but Morton and May, who went in the opposite direction.

"They'll get nicely fooled," continued Bess, as her party crossed the railroad. "There is no nice place up that way for a picnic."

"Here we are at your grove, Bess," sang out

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Art a few moments later, as they reached the place, a large, pleasant park, enclosed with a wire fence. The party stopped and began looking about for some way of entrance. Suddenly Art exclaimed, as he pointed to a placard on one of the trees, "Say, girls, look here!"

The girls looked, and read:

"No trespassing on these premises under fine of ten dollars. For picnics inquire at the station."

There was a chorus of oh's, and the girls' faces fell.

"I'll inquire at the station," said Ferdinand, "and we won't let Mort know anything about it, because we'd never hear the last of it. You wait here until I come back."

He was off like a flash, and soon returned, saying that the grove was five dollars for the day. The boys immediately began to count their money: between them all they had just six dollars. Besides that, there were no conveniences for fishing at the grove, and so, rather crestfallen, they turned around and followed the road Mort and May had taken.

It was hot and dusty, and looking at Mabel's flushed face, Will said,—

"You girls rest here on this shady hill-side while we look for a place. Come on, boys." And he started off, followed by Ferdinand.

"I don't care to go," answered Art, throwing himself on the ground. "I'd rather stay here where it's shady."

"Of course you'd rather do anything than exert yourself," said Edna, sharply.

"Don't quarrel," said Grace, turning up her overskirt preparatory to sitting down, when she was interrupted by an exclamation from Bess.

"Grace, don't sit down on that damp grass! Don't you know your mother said you must not get wet?"

"She can sit on this bucket," said Art, handing her the wooden one they had brought for water.

"Thanks," was the sharp retort. "Don't trouble yourself. I think I can get along without any of your assistance."

"Well, you needn't bite a fellow's head off," said Art, as he replaced the bucket and himself at the same time.

"Don't quarrel," observed Edna, slyly.

She was comfortably ensconced on a large, flat stone beneath an elm-tree. Suddenly she gave a scream, slapping her neck sharply, and began to bounce up and down.

"What on earth is the matter?" asked Grace, while Bess and Amy rushed to the rescue of the afflicted damsel with all possible speed.

"What? where?" cried Bess, who had a dim

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"What? where?" cried Bess, who had a dim

idea that a bug of some sort had started on an exploring expedition down Edna's neck.

"Down my back! catch him; quick!" answered Edna, with a shudder. Bess made a grab at the place indicated, but the bug made himself scarce in that vicinity, and Edna cried, "Bess, do hurry; it's a nasty old caterpillar. Please—— Now you've got him!" as Bess made another effort, and succeeded in capturing the foe. "Be careful and don't mash him. Ugh! but he feels so slimy,—dreadful thing!" as Bess carefully unfastened her waist and took out the half-mashed worm with a leaf. "Just think of having him crawling all over you!"

"You had better not sit down again," advised Amy.

"Indeed, I won't," was the answer. And Edna took her station a safe distance from any tree, and stood resolutely up, though she declared herself "tired enough to drop." Presently she exclaimed, "What in the world are Mort and May trying to do?"

"Where?" asked Bess.

"Over there on that island."

The river at this point was nothing more than a wide creek, and very shallow. It branched right and left, and enclosed a small, wooded island, from which Morton and his companion were now seen trying to make their way. They

tried first one side and then the other, but all in vain. There seemed to be no way to cross.

"Serves them right for being so smart," said Art, as he watched Mort take May's hand to help her down the bank.

"Why don't they go back the way they went?" said Bess. "They surely must know how they got there."

"Want any help?" shouted Art, making a trumpet with his hands. There was no response, and he was about to shout again, when Edna interrupted,—

"Don't! We don't want them to know we didn't get the grove, and they will if you keep yelling at them."

"They wouldn't know it anyway, would they, when they saw us hunting for some other place?" asked Art, provokingly.

"They can't say anything anyhow," said Grace, "because, from the appearance of things, they are as badly fooled as we were."

"Here comes Will. I hope he's got a place," said Edna, as that young man hove in sight, covered with dust and glory, for he waved his hat triumphantly.

"Come on!" he shouted. "There's a splendid place up here."

The party gathered up the baskets, umbrellas, and shawls, and once more started onward.

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"Let me take that," said Will, taking Bess's basket, and then Grace's. "Now, Miss Mabel, let me have yours."

"This little tin bucket!" she exclaimed, holding it up to view. "No, thank you; I can carry it myself."

"Mabel's got something good in that," said Grace.

"If it's ice-cream, Miss Mabel, I want some," drawled Art.

"I believe *you'd* rather die than carry anything for a girl," said Bess, casting a contemptuous look at the boy, who was lagging behind the rest, shading himself with a huge Chinese umbrella.

"If I should exert myself I wouldn't be able to enjoy the picnic," he replied.

"Perhaps you had better take my arm," Bess suggested, with a touch of scorn in her voice.

"Thanks," accepting it. "That's a good deal better."

"Don't walk in the grass, Grace," said Will, mischievously, as she stepped aside from the dusty road. "Don't forget what your mother said."

"Yes," chimed in Edna, "don't forget what your mother said." Then, turning to the rest of the company, she went on: "Grace's mother said she mustn't walk or sit on the grass if it was damp, and she must not run or jump or play,

because it might excite her and bring back the fe——"

"Oh, shut up!" was Grace's polite retort. "Walking on the grass is not very exciting, and besides, I'm not going to tramp along in the dust."

"Don't quarrel," observed Art.

Nobody paid any attention to him, and presently Will exclaimed, as Morton and May appeared on the bank below them, "Halloo! there's Mort. Say, Mort, got that grove picked out yet?"

"Everything ready for us to come?" shouted Art.

"They're coming to us," said Edna, a moment later. They stopped and waited, and soon were joined by the unsuccessful grove-hunters.

"How did you get over the brook?" asked Grace, as they came up.

"Do you suppose we're going to tell?" inquired May, coolly. "What was the matter with Bess's grove?" she added. "Why didn't you stay there?"

"Humph! do you think we're going to tell?" retorted Grace.

May looked rather crestfallen, but made no answer.

"Here's the place," said Will, a moment later, as they arrived at a pleasant, shady spot on the right. They all looked eagerly. The creek here was wider and deeper, and afforded capital fish-

ing. On one side of them was a high trestle: at the front and back were hills.

"What a nice place!" exclaimed the girls in a chorus.

Ferdinand came to meet them, and they began to unload immediately, and then Morton revealed the contents of his bundle, which proved to be a tent.

"Hurrah!" cried Bess. "Morty, you're the best brother that ever was. Do hurry and put it up."

It required some little time to put it up properly, but at last it was pitched satisfactorily, and the girls crowded into it with exclamations of delight.

"How nice!" said May, standing in the door, and looking around. "This will be our kitchen."

Morton, Bess, and Ferdinand were elected cooks, and, after stowing away the cooking utensils in a corner of the kitchen, the girls proceeded to the water, where the boys were baiting hooks.

"Now for a fish," said Bess, as she "cast in."

"Don't count him before you catch him, Bess!" shouted Art from his place on the low, hanging bough of a tree that projected over the water.

"Look out, Art, or you'll make a bait of yourself!" cried Will.

"Ho! keep your warnings for somebody that needs them."

"Oh! oh! I've got one!" cried May, excitedly, beginning to pull in her line as fast as she could. "Oh, pshaw!" she added, disconsolately, as the empty hook came into view; "the bait's all eaten off."

The others, who had been watching with breathless interest, gave a shout of derision.

"Ha! ha! the first catch of the season," cried Art.

"Want me to help land him?" asked Will.

"You never mind," answered May, as she baited her hook again, and waited patiently for another bite.

Amy now pulled in her line with a fish attached, and a few minutes after Mabel followed her example, also successful. Amid the general excitement of landing them they were interrupted by an exclamation from Grace; and giving her line a sudden jerk, she brought into view a large fine fish with a crab hanging to its tail. At sight of the latter Grace dropped her pole and fled precipitately, for she had a mortal terror of such things that she never could overcome. At her hasty flight the others laughed.

"Come back, Grace," called Will, as he detached the little animal from the fish and threw it back into the water.

"The crab's gone," said Bess.

"Better get somebody to do your fishing for

you," said Art, as Grace came back trembling so she could scarcely stand.

"Perhaps I'd better get you," was the sharp retort, "as you are such a fine fisherman. You have been angling there ever since we began, and haven't caught even a crab yet."

In the general laugh that followed Grace concealed her emotion, but she waited a while before she made another attempt at fishing.

All was quiet for a time, when suddenly—"Hooray!" shouted Art, hauling in his line with all possible speed. "I've got a bite! By Jove! Will, but he's a flopper!"

In his excitement his hat flew off, but such a trifling thing was not to be noticed, and he tugged away valiantly, the others watching him breathlessly.

Suddenly there was a splash, the water flew in every direction, the bough swayed violently up and down, and the boy, oh, where was he?

"Good! good!" shouted May, clapping her hands and dancing frantically around like an Indian at a war-dance. "How does it look down there, Art? You will get your neck clean for once, anyway. Oh, but you're a sweet-looking pickle!" she went on, provokingly, as the head of the discomfited fisherman appeared above the waves.

"I say, Art," said Ferdinand, who had caught

Art's rod when it fell into the water. "Here's your fish." And he held up to view an old battered tin boiler. "How do you like him? Quite a flopper, isn't he?"

"Oh, you mind your own affairs," growled Arthur, when he once more stood on dry land.

"Thank you, I intend to," answered Ferdinand, pulling in a large, plump fish.

Edna, who had kept quiet all the while, now felt a tugging at her line, and instead of pulling in as she ought to have done, began backing hastily, dragging her line after her.

"Pull in! pull in!" shouted Will and Morton, rushing to her assistance, but by this time her prize was landed. It proved to be a small catfish, that wriggled violently to free itself. Morton took charge of him, and soon had him "strung on a stick," as Amy's little sister, Verdina, expressed it. She, with her two sisters, Agnes and Delphine, had been sitting on a log watching the fishing with a great deal of interest.

Edna's hook was quickly rebaited, and this time she caught the largest fish of any. Arthur retired to a sunny spot to dry and fish and plan some way to play a trick on his sister.

"I know what I'll do," he said to himself. "I'll put two crabs where they'll hang on to her dress when she sits down. They can't hurt her,

and it will be jolly fun to see her scream and run." And he chuckled to himself at the thought; but his cunning little trick was destined to have a more serious ending than the one he anticipated.

About half-past eleven the cooks retired to the kitchen, and the others to lounge around under the trees.

Grace sought out a smooth grassy knoll under one of the trees, and opening a book, began to read. Presently she felt something crawling up her dress, and looked down, then sprang to her feet with a frightened exclamation, and Art, who was watching, burst out laughing. But his laughter was cut short, for suddenly Grace's face grew deathly white, and, without warning, she fell backwards into May's arms.

"Now you've done it!" exclaimed that young lady, beginning to fan Grace vigorously, for she saw the crabs, and guessed that it was some of Art's work.

Will dashed into the kitchen for a cup of water, which he threw in Grace's face, and the frightened cooks came rushing out to see what was the matter.

In less time than it takes to tell it the shawls were arranged in a soft heap on the ground and Grace placed comfortably on them, with her head supported by May's arm, and the others chafing her hands and fanning her.

For fully ten minutes they worked with her, and still Grace did not come to; and suddenly May exclaimed, in a frightened voice, "Oh, girls, look at her!" for Grace's lips moved convulsively, and a slight froth gathered around the corners of her mouth. Will waited to see no more, but dashed off to the nearest house to find a doctor. But before he came back, unsuccessful, Grace revived. She looked around her in a dazed way, and asked of May, "Who struck me?"

"Why, nobody," answered May.

"Yes, they did. Somebody threw a stone and hit me right here," raising her hand to the back of her head.

"Why, no, Grace. Don't you remember the crabs were crawling up your dress, and you got frightened——"

"No. I remember of standing up, and something struck me, and that's all."

"I wouldn't talk any more now," said Bess, giving May a warning glance. "Just lie still, and let the girls talk to you."

"Lay your head in my lap," said Mabel. "There,—that's it. Now then, shall I read to you?"

"No," answered Grace, clasping Mabel's hand in hers. "Tell me about your home and yourself." And while Mabel obeyed, May stole away to find Art. She found him sitting by

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the river, his face almost as white as Grace's own.

"Oh, May, how is she?" he began; but May interrupted him, in tones of reproach,—

"Art, how could you? Don't you know she has heart-disease, and any sudden fright may kill her?"

"I didn't intend to frighten *her*, May," replied the boy; "I hadn't the least idea she would sit down there. I put them there for you, because I knew you were not easily frightened, and it is so much fun to hear you scold, and—— Oh, May! has she come to? will she ever get over it?" And Art looked the picture of despair.

"Yes," answered May; "but we thought for a while she never would," and her voice lowered solemnly. "I'm afraid she won't enjoy the picnic now."

Art said no more, but resolved to ask Grace's forgiveness, and watched his opportunity. He found it presently, when the others were busily engaged in setting the table, and Grace was sitting alone watching them.

As Art expressed it, he would rather have faced half a dozen cannons than that one girl, and his courage almost failed him as he approached her, but he was not one to retreat after having gone this far: so he resolutely addressed Grace, and begged her pardon like a man. Of course she

forgave him, and promised never to think of it again.

"I think it is my place to beg pardon for frightening them all so," she said, as Arthur seated himself beside her. "It was very silly in me to make such a scene, but I couldn't help it; I have a mortal dread of such things." And Grace shuddered involuntarily.

"Oh, don't faint again!" cried Art, alarmed, but Grace reassured him with a light laugh.

"Don't be afraid; I don't do that when I'm going to faint."

The sudden blast of a horn startled her, and made her cover up her ears.

"Dinner's ready," announced Will, approaching, and making a graceful flourish with the tin trumpet he carried.

"Couldn't you announce it with a little less noise?" asked Grace, laughingly, as she took his proffered arm, and was escorted to the table in great state.

Art was assigned a seat between Edna and May, and they teased him most unmercifully all through dinner. After that delightful meal was over they disposed themselves in various graceful positions on the grass.

"Let's have some tableaux or charades," proposed Grace, after they had tried a few quiet games.

"That's capital!" exclaimed Art, swinging his hat in the air. "Proceed to continue," he added, in the manner of one delivering a command.

"Little boys should be seen and not heard," said Grace, severely.

"Don't quarrel," sang Edna.

"That joke is getting stale," went on Grace. "How shall we divide?" she added, looking around the group.

"You, Art, Miss Stewart, Ferdinand, Bess, and one of the little girls," said Edna.

"I don't care to play, so you can take May in my stead."

"You take me, Miss Mabel," said Delphine, a brown-eyed child of eleven, winding her arms around Mabel's waist. She had attached herself to that young lady from the first, and had privately declared to her that she had never seen any one she loved so well.

The actors and audience having divided themselves, the table-cloth was hung up between two trees for a curtain, and the "celebrated company," as Grace called them, disappeared behind it, while the audience seated themselves on the ground in front, and anxiously awaited the appearance of the company.

Presently a loud trumpet-blast sounded, and Ferdinand came before the curtain, and in a voice choked with emotion requested them to get out

their handkerchiefs, as they were now about to witness the painfully tragical tableau "The Babes in the Woods," in two scenes, and as they all knew the sad story of the poor little innocents it would not be necessary for him to repeat it; and, after blowing another blast on the tin trumpet, he vanished.

Almost instantaneously the curtain was drawn aside, and a sad scene was presented.

There stood Art, his trousers tucked into his boots, Verdina's rubber apron tied around his neck, her little blue sun-bonnet swinging in one hand, while the other was dug into his eye, his capacious mouth drawn as far down at the corners as it could possibly go, while water was artistically dropped over his face to simulate tears.

By his side stood May, who was as tall and thin as her brother was short and fat. She was dressed in a babyfied manner, and carried an open lunch-basket, into which she was peering with eager eyes, while one hand conveyed its contents to her mouth.

Convulsed sounds came from behind the scenes, and the heartless audience shrieked with laughter. This and the disturbance in the green-room caused quite a commotion in the breasts of the "Babes," and the curtain was quickly drawn to. Only for a moment, when it was again rolled back, and disclosed the poor little innocents lying on the ground, covered with leaves. The audience ap-

plauded vociferously as the curtain "fell"; so much so that the "Babes" were forced to come to the front, holding each other by the hand, and bow their acknowledgments.

They disappeared, and shortly after a pompous-looking stage-manager made his appearance and announced that there would be an intermission of five minutes, after which "Juliet and Romeo" would be presented. There was a murmur of admiration when the curtain rose the next time.

Between the forks of a small maple-tree a scarlet shawl had been deftly arranged to represent curtains, and between its voluminous folds appeared Mabel's face. Her golden tresses flowed gracefully down over her shoulders and arms; a wreath of maple-leaves crowned her head, and her chin rested pensively in the hollow of her hand.

Beneath this impromptu window knelt Ferdinand. His soft felt hat was pinned up into a "George Washington" shape, with Mabel's long white plume waving over his shoulder. Amy's light dolman, turned wrong side out, was thrown carelessly around him, like the cavalier cloak of olden time. He was attired in knee-breeches, and carried a guitar,—a long, flat shingle, cut the desired shape, with twine strings. He knelt gracefully on one knee, and was in the act of serenading his lady-love, who gazed down at him with rapt

devotion. Shawls had been hung around to make it look dark, and very effective moonlight, made by lighting May's pocket-lamp and holding it behind green tissue-paper, straggled through the trees and fell faintly upon the love-sick bard and his inamorata.

This really good tableau was greeted with immense applause, and had to be repeated.

The next thing on the programme was an acting charade, "Little Red Riding-hood." The red shawl was again brought into requisition to decorate Delphine, who, with a basket on her arm, made quite a charming Riding-hood. Mabel looked a model mother in her white apron and "handkerchief" cap, as she kissed her daughter good-by, telling her not to stop to play, and watched her start briskly off, turning around to waft her fond parent a parting kiss. The next scene was a wood, with little Red Riding-hood walking slowly along, when enter a huge wolf, that looked as if he had just been dining on plump little girls; but, notwithstanding his "stuffy" appearance, he glared at poor little Riding-hood with hungry, glittering eyes, his red tongue lolling out of his mouth in a threatening manner as he advanced.

Art made a capital wolf, dressed in May's gray shawl, a paper head with holes cut for his eyes, nose, and mouth, and two stiff, formidable-looking

ears, that stood bolt upright on each side of his head.

After a short conversation, of which every one knows the substance, the wolf proceeded on his way, while naughty Riding-hood, suddenly remembering her promise to her mamma not to loiter, rushed off the stage with all possible speed. The next scene was a bedroom, with a pallet in one corner. On it reposed the wicked wolf, who looked plumper than ever, having just disposed of the poor old grandmother. Every now and then he raised up to see if his intended victim was coming. A nightcap composed of handkerchiefs partly concealed his ferocious features.

Presently in came the disobedient Riding-hood, and after that memorable dialogue was rehearsed, the wolf sprang out of bed, eager to devour his prey; and at the same moment Ferdinand sprang in, followed by Mrs. Riding-hood, and felled the monster with one blow of his axe, while the overjoyed mother clasped her rescued child to her breast, and the curtain fell amidst the cheers of the admiring audience.

One more tableau, "The Wood Nymph," was presented. The moonlight again appeared, but this time it was brighter, and its rays fell on Bess leaning against a tree. She was draped with the canvas of the tent, which had been taken down; her rounded arms were bared above the dimpled

elbows, and were clasped by bracelets of locust-leaves. On her head reposed the identical wreath that had crowned Juliet's classic brow. Her "bonnie brown hair" had been loosened from its braids, and rippled in all its luxuriant glory far below her waist. One hand held a harp, also constructed from a shingle, and trimmed with leaves; the other was placed carelessly on a low branch of the tree, and supported her head.

As the curtain descended on this lovely tableau, cheer after cheer arose from the throats of the appreciative audience, but the Wood Nymph declined to appear a second time.

The "celebrated company" filed down into the dress circle a few moments after, announcing themselves "tired to death," and disposed their weary bodies in anything but graceful positions on the grass.

"However did you contrive it all?" asked Edna. "It was perfectly splendid."

"It was just like a surely theatre," said Verdi.

"That's quite a compliment," said the "Nymph," drawing the child to a seat beside her. "But say," she went on, "you distinguished dress circle; you have had quite an easy time of it, sitting comfortably still watching us bounce about, almost at our wits' end how to fix and contrive so as to please your fastidious fancy; suppose now that you bestir yourselves a little

to entertain us; while we rest our artistic limbs upon——"

"Well, if we must, I suppose we must," interrupted Morton, rising to his feet; "so come on, 'my jolly tars,' as the old sailor used to say, and let us show them what we can do."

What they could do proved to be rather amusing, judging by the looks and actions of the audience, and the retirement of the actors from the stage was greeted with, "Oh, pshaw! why didn't you keep on? We enjoyed it immensely."

"We are going to 'keep on,'" answered Morton, consulting his watch. "That is, if we want to catch that five o'clock train home, and it's half-past four now."

There was a general uprising at these words, and for the next fifteen minutes there was a wild rushing around, picking up scattered articles and getting in each other's way; a bumping of heads against trees, and finally winding up with Edna's almost falling into the creek; but she was rescued by Bess, who appeared just in the nick of time, and at last they were on their way down the road to the station.

"Well," said Edna, as they hove in sight of that unpretentious edifice, "we've had a great many adventures to-day. In the first place Art fell in the river, then Grace fainted, and I came very near getting drowned; but, as the im-

mortal Shelley says, 'All's well that ends well.'"

"Shelley!" exclaimed Art, joining the others in the shout that followed Edna's words. "Shelley! Edna, if you'll tell me when your next birthday is I'll present you with a volume of literature. Besides, Shelley isn't immortal. He was an unbeliever, and——

"Oh, Art, you horrid boy! That's worse yet!" cried Grace. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"No, ma'am; not at all," answered Art. "I was around the corner when shame went by."

"I think you must have been there when common sense went by too," exclaimed Edna, angrily, her cheeks full of scarlet indignation.

"I was, but I see it wasn't wasted on you," returned Art, coolly.

Edna flashed back a ready answer, and there were indications that a fierce wordy war was fast brewing, when luckily the train came up in time to prevent any such catastrophe, and by the time the merry crew arrived home Edna's anger had cooled down, and she was ready to laugh with the others over her absurd mistake.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RETURN TO SCHOOL.

THE next Friday morning found Amy, Bess, and Mabel seated in the train, *en route* for Hillsboro'; for Mrs. Barrett had changed her rules and regulations somewhat, and had decided to begin her term in September instead of November, as formerly.

At Fort W——, our three girls were joined by Lou and Alice. Of course, each one had lots to tell of the fun she had during her vacation; where it had been spent and how, and their fellow-travellers smiled sympathetically, as they contemplated the bright-faced school-girls who enjoyed life with such zest.

When school was reached the next morning, a crowd of girls came rushing out to meet them, and there was a perfect hubbub of questions and exclamations. Mabel could not help contrasting her second school-coming with the first. Then she was home-sick and forlorn; now she felt almost as if she were coming home. There were all the old friends to greet, all the old familiar

places to visit, and last, but not least, all the newcomers to watch and pity, if they evinced any signs of home-sickness.

There was quite a number of new girls this term, among them one who promised to be a great favorite with them all: Clara Montgomery, a young distant cousin of Mrs. Barrett's, and who roomed with the principal. She had also been related to Nell, and although the connection was very slight, a few of the girls imagined her to look like Nell.

And indeed Clara did have much of the same sweet, gentle disposition that Nell did. Perhaps that was why the girls all liked her so much at the first.

Miss Hadley was delighted to see all her old scholars again, and welcomed them with more than a teacher's warmth.

Miss Metz was there no longer, but in her stead was a very happy-faced lady, called Mrs. Metz-Beck. A dignified, noble-looking gentleman took upon himself great honors for having won the little lady.

Mr. Schenk and Miss Shrumberger were also there, and the poor gentleman was as much in terror as ever of the stout lady's wiles.

All the other old teachers had been re-engaged, and nothing about the school was changed much, except the rules. Mrs. Barrett had drawn up an

entire new code of them, and they were "just horrid"; even more strict than they had been last year.

Some way or other Mrs. Barrett had gotten an inkling of the Saturday afternoon escapades, and prohibited the girls from going out any more unattended by one of the teachers.

But, notwithstanding, some of the girls very adroitly managed to elude the very vigilant watch put upon them, and many were the devices and manœuvres practised by which the girls managed to have fun in spite of the presence of Mrs. Metz-Beck, who always accompanied them on their Hillsboro' expeditions.

One Saturday, about three weeks after the beginning of the term, Connie said to Bess and Mabel,—

"Oh, girls! there's the handsomest young dentist up-town. He's just lately moved here, for I saw his sign out for the first time this afternoon, when I was out with Mrs. Metz. He was standing by his office window, and he is *so* handsome and dashing. I really must go soon and have my teeth attended to, for his sign says 'work done cheap,' and I know I can't afford to pay much."

Bess laughed significantly, and after that it was surprising to see how many girls suddenly became aware of the important fact that their teeth needed immediate attention. Iolanthe especially was

afflicted with the toothache every day or two. So many of her teeth needed filling also, and as good work, cheaply done, was the one thing needful on account of the flatness of her purse, she paid the young dentist a call.

He, poor young man, was quite surprised at the numerous orders he received, and was delighted to think he had settled in such a well-to-do place as Hillsboro' seemed to be; but all of a sudden those of his young lady patrons whose visits had been the most frequent stopped, and the surprised wielder of forceps could assign no reason for the desertion, which apparently had been without cause.

But the long-suffering Mrs. Metz-Beck had begun to see through the toothache game at last. It was unnatural to her that so many girls should all be seized with the same kind of ache at about the same time, and it was most wonderful how poor they all seemed to have grown, and how intent upon being economical; "but it is *so* extravagant, you know, to pay so much for having the teeth filled, especially when you have to go so many times, and little things do count up so."

But too many girls in the school practised economy to make it a success, and Mrs. Barrett also concluded to become economical, and told the girls they must not spend any more money on their teeth, and if any dentist was absolutely

needed, she would have old Mr. B—— come to the school and attend to them.

After that all the toothache in the school was cured as if by magic, and old Mr. B——'s services were not required.

Of course, there were a great many of the girls who had not seen the captivating young dentist, among them Bess and Mabel; the former young lady appearing utterly indifferent to the gentleman's numerous charms, as described by the girls who had been so fortunate as to behold them, and now, since Mrs. Barrett had issued her stern decree, she was not likely to have even the shadow of a chance.

A few days after this, Lizzie, the dining-room girl, was taken with a sudden and violent toothache, and declared she must have the offending member extracted. So Thursday evening after supper, when the girls were all at hard study in their rooms, Lizzie, enveloped in a bright red shawl, and with a thick veil tied over her face, was seen walking rapidly up the street that led from the seminary.

Young Mr. Fraser was sitting in his office that afternoon, still wondering over the sudden cessation of the young ladies' visits, when there came a ring at his door-bell, and his colored man ushered in a young lady. She was quite a pretty girl, with wicked brown eyes, and, notwithstanding the

fact that she spoke with a broad, Irish brogue, she did not look like a native of Erin's green isle; but then Lizzie was an exception to the rest of her class. Her teeth, she told the dentist, had been troubling her somewhat lately, especially at meal-times, and she had come to see if they needed any particular attention.

The young dentist examined the even, pearl-like teeth very carefully. It took him quite a while to do it, but then Lizzie was an uncommonly pretty girl, and it was a pleasure to be near her; rather a dangerous pleasure though for once when the young man cautiously inserted his finger in her mouth, the little sharp teeth suddenly came down upon it and held it in a vise-like grip.

Of course, the wicked little wretch was ever so sorry afterwards, declared it was all an accident, and stroked the slender white digit with remorseful tenderness, every touch of the soft fingers sending a delightful thrill through the dentist's susceptible heart.

He wondered slightly that a servant-girl, as his patron declared herself to be, should have such plump, white hands; but Lizzie was waiter-girl, you know, and had no work to do that would make her hands hard, or calloused, or red.

As it was getting quite dark, it took some time to examine all the teeth, and it was fully an hour

before Lizzie emerged from the dentist's office and wended her way homeward.

The seminary girls were allowed to burn only a certain amount of oil in their lamps each night, and the next morning after Lizzie's visit to the dentist's, the lamp of No. 8 came down-stairs to be filled.

"How does this happen?" sternly asked Mrs. Barrett, looking at Bess suspiciously, and the young lady rather reluctantly admitted that she had sat up a little later than usual the preceding night to study her lessons.

The principal looked at her sharply for a few moments; but she had no reason to doubt the girl's word, and said nothing more about it.

As Lizzie—part of whose business was to attend to the lamps—poured the oil into Bess's, she chuckled gleefully to herself over something, and thought complacently of a blue silk handkerchief that quietly reposed in her bureau drawer up-stairs. When questioned about her toothache, she said, "Shure, and the dintist cured it entirely, for it has not bothered me since."

And the young dentist certainly *had* worked a most effectual cure, for Lizzie never had occasion to have her teeth doctored again; and the young man, who had fallen deeply in love with his naughty customer, watched in vain for her to come a second time, and was really sorry when

the prints of the unruly teeth disappeared from his finger, for they were all he had to remind him of the pretty servant-girl. She never came to his office again, but often on a Saturday afternoon he would chance to meet a pair of saucy brown eyes sparkling from beneath a sealskin cap, and would almost stare their owner out of countenance in blank bewilderment; but there was no use in trying to get a glance from the roguish orbs, for they were always attended by a strict-looking lady, who guarded her pretty charge with ogre-like eyes.

CHAPTER XVI.

IOLANTHE AS A HEROINE.

ONE bitter cold morning towards the last of November a little crowd of excited girls were gathered in the school-room, waiting for the nine o'clock bell to ring, and discussing an event that was likely to be the nine days' wonder among the Hillsboroites,—namely, a great fire that had broken out in the village the night before, and burned three dwelling-houses to the ground.

Mrs. Barrett took two morning papers, so of course Clara had read about the dreadful affair, and imparted it to the others, and they were now discussing with lively interest the bravery of one of the firemen, who, at the peril of his own life, entered one of the burning, tottering buildings and rescued two children.

"Just think!" exclaimed Clara, "after he got almost up the ladder broke, but he made a desperate spring and gained the window-ledge just as it (the ladder) fell to the ground."

"How did he get down again?" asked Alice.

"They raised another ladder, and just as he got safely down with the children the walls of the building fell in."

"Jutht imagine!" said Iolanthe, with a shudder. "How mutht he have felt when he faced all thothe horrid flameth and knew that they were certain death if he made a mithtep, and perhapth anyway! I would have thhrunk back, undecided whether to go or thtay."

"Every one is not such a coward as *you* are," said Jocelyn, curtly. "Most likely *you* would have 'thtayed,'" she added, mockingly.

A flood of crimson swept over Iolanthe's face, and she turned and walked away to the window.

"I am sure *I* would not dare attempt such a brave act," said Connie, hoping to restore peace again. "When I was a child I went down a well on a rope to rescue my kitten, but I could never face death for a stranger."

"Well, girls, I'll tell you. We don't any of us know what we would *do* when it came to the trial. We all *think* and *conjecture* what we would do, but not one of us really *knows*."

This was from Amy. She had entered in time to hear Connie's words.

"Hurrah for Amy!" shouted Letta. "She's hit the nail on the head *exactly*."

"That is just it," added Clara. "We *think* we would do so-and-so, but we don't *know*."

"Thome people do think they are awful thmart," sneered Iolanthe, joining the group again.

She and Amy were bitter enemies now. The latter usually treated her with silent contempt, but I am sorry to say that now and then, when Iolanthe became too unbearable, she was not above wrangling with her. Now she looked at the girl coolly for a few minutes, and then answered, quietly, "So I perceive."

Amy's meaning was too plain to be mistaken, and with her face almost purple with rage that she had nothing spiteful to say in return, Iolanthe turned around with an angry flounce and went to her desk, while Amy, who had come for a lead-pencil, quietly helped herself from the cupboard and took her departure.

The recitation-bell would ring in a few minutes, so the girls dispersed to their various seats, but they had scarcely done so when they were startled by a shrill scream, and Iolanthe sprang from her seat pale and trembling.

"What is it?" cried one or two of the girls, springing up and rushing towards her.

Iolanthe pointed towards her desk. "There," she cried, in tones that plainly indicated fear. "Thee it."

They all looked eagerly.

"*A spider!*" exclaimed Jocelyn, in a tone of such utter contempt that it brought an involuntary smile to the faces of her hearers.

"Thomebody catch me, I'm going to faint," said Iolanthe, beginning to waver.

"Faint away," returned Jocelyn, coolly. "The floor will be only too glad to catch you."

Her remark was not heard as far as Iolanthe was concerned, for almost before the words were out of Jocelyn's mouth she fell forward.

Clara, being nearest to her, caught the fainting girl in her arms. Bess sprang to her assistance, and they raised Iolanthe to a chair.

"Some one go for camphor, quick!" called Bess, as she chafed one of the limp hands.

Not a girl moved. A flush suffused her dark face, and Bess said, in a tone of indignant reproach, "Girls, you might at least be humane. If it were a dog that had fainted you would try to restore it."

"*I* wouldn't, so I don't have to go," answered Jocelyn, stoically, resuming her seat.

Bess looked at her for a moment in unfeigned, undisguised scorn, and then said to Clara, "Clara, if you will take this other hand *I'll* go."

But just at this juncture Mabel, who had disappeared when Lyn began to speak, returned, and handed Bess the desired restorative.

"Thank you, Mab," she said, casting a second

glance of contempt at Jocelyn, who *did* look a trifle ashamed of her words.

Under the influence of the chafing and the camphor Iolanthe was slowly regaining consciousness, when the bell rang, and Mrs. Barrett, accompanied by Mrs. Metz-Beck, entered the room.

"What is the matter?" cried both ladies, as they saw the little group on the platform.

Bess explained in a few words; but Mrs. Metz had already caught sight of Iolanthe, and, rushing to her side, pushed Clara away and threw her arms around her favorite.

"My dearest Io, what is it?"

Iolanthe opened her eyes, and looked at the teacher with an expression on her insipid face that the girls had never seen there before,—an unutterable, unsatisfied longing, as though she were reaching for something beyond her grasp. Only for a moment, however, when suddenly she rose to her feet and turned to Mrs. Barrett.

"If you will pleathe excuthe me, Mrs. Barrett, I will go to my room," she said, in the old, affected manner.

"You are excusable, but only for this morning," answered Mrs. Barrett, and Iolanthe thanked her and left the room.

The girls settled themselves to work, and the morning's adventure was forgotten for the time being; but as soon as they were free it was the

subject of their conversation, and many were the covert sneers cast at Iolanthe at the dinner-table. Recreation-time, when the girls as usual were gathered around the register in the hall, Jocelyn exerted herself to the utmost to remind Iolanthe of her weakness.

She was standing, looking out of the window, when suddenly she gave a little scream, and jerked back.

"Jocelyn, what ails you?" demanded Lou.

"I—I—thought I saw a fly on the window-pane," faintly articulated wicked Lyn. "Oh! oh! I'm going to swoon. Do somebody take hold of me."

She staggered wildly about, rolling her eyes and clutching at the wall; then she suddenly straightened herself, and bowed mockingly to Iolanthe, who stood silently watching her.

"*Didn't* I look just *too* lovely for anything sailing around like I was drunk? Well, that's just the way some one else looked not two hundred years ago, only lovelier, if possible. Oh, here's Amy," as that young lady appeared on the stairs. "Amy, did you see me just now?"

"No; what did you do?"

"Watch me." And Jocelyn again went through her performance, Amy looking on with amazed eyes.

"What *are* you trying to do?" she asked.

"That is a *fac-simile* of a pantomime rehearsed for our benefit in the school-room this morning, the principal actor being Miss Wyville, whose delicate nerves were all unstrung by the sight of a spider, and, as we afterwards ascertained, a *dead* one."

Amy curled her lips scornfully, and sent a glance of deep derision at Iolanthe, which the latter returned with all the maliciousness and hatred she could muster.

Jocelyn kept up her "fun," as she called it, until the girls finally grew tired of so much useless abuse, for such it really was, and one by one they wandered away, and Mabel began to wonder how Iolanthe stood it all so quietly.

She felt really sorry for the girl, much as she disliked her, and had a much less better opinion of Jocelyn and the few others who helped her in her tirade against the unoffending Iolanthe.

The call to lessons was for once a relief, but when the afternoon recess came, during which time the girls were obliged to exercise in the halls or yard, as they chose, Jocelyn began again. Iolanthe listened to her taunting words mutely, a pathetic light in her eyes, a dumb grief, as it were, that went to Bess's heart. She stood by quietly for a few minutes, and then interrupted Jocelyn sternly. Her eyes flashed indignantly, and the expression on her face was one of mingled

surprise, scorn, and pity, and Jocelyn involuntarily drew back as she looked at her.

"I think you have said quite enough," continued Bess. "If your words were merely light banter, and Iolanthe took them as such, it would be entirely different, but every syllable you utter you mean. If you think you are raising yourself in any one's estimation you are mistaken, and when you come to your senses—for I don't believe you are acting according to your ideas of right—you will be heartily ashamed of yourself. There is such a thing as running things in the ground. We have had that quite clearly illustrated here to-day, and whoever offers Iolanthe any further insult will please remember that they are insulting *me* as well. If you have nothing better to do, girls, I am sorry for you, but I think you could with impunity get 'Webster' and study the definitions of 'courtesy,' 'politeness,' 'ladylike,' and other like words."

While Bess was delivering this eloquent speech, Iolanthe stood looking at her with amazement. When she was through Jocelyn said, mockingly,—

"Well, Lawyer Grahame, allow me to congratulate you. Your plea was very fine; excellent."

She, as well as the few girls who joined with her in taunting Iolanthe, were angry at the rebuke which they knew they deserved, but they all ad-

mired Bess exceedingly, and did not wish to incur her displeasure, so, thanks to the Grahame Gem, Iolanthe was left in peace again.

That night Iolanthe was awakened by a peculiar feeling of unrest and a vague sensation that something was wrong. She lay still for a minute, and then gave herself a mental shake.

"What a goose I am!" she said to herself. "There is nothing the matter."

She turned over, and, pulling the coverlet over her head, tried to go to sleep; but in vain. Her mind wandered away to stories she had read or heard about people who had had presentiments of evil; others who had wakened out of a sound sleep, and, feeling uneasy, had looked under their beds and found there a malicious burglar.

"What if there should be one under mine!" thought Iolanthe. The very idea filled her with terror, and, huddling up in as small a heap as possible in the middle of the bed, she listened intently; and sure enough she did hear a queer noise under her bed: like a man breathing heavily. The more the girl thought of it, and the longer she listened, the more convinced she became that there was a burglar in her room.

As the minutes dragged horribly by, Iolanthe became almost frantic with fright. She dare not remain a second longer in the room, for the man

might jump out at any moment and seize her by the throat. But how was she to effect her escape? If she attempted to get out of bed the robber might catch her by the foot; if she—ah, she had it! She would pretend to have forgotten that she had not quenched her usual evening thirst and let on as though she was going down-stairs to get that; so she exclaimed, in a voice that trembled with fright, "Dear me, I didn't get my drink; I mutht go and get one, or elthe I can't go to thleep." And crawling cautiously out of bed, keeping her feet as far away from the edge as she possibly could, Iolanthe opened her door and stepped into the hall, closing it after her. Unconsciously she looked across at Amy's door, and through the transom she could see something bright and flickering mingled with a dark, cloud-like substance, that seemed to be getting higher and thicker every minute. A terrible dread seized Iolanthe, and her heart almost stood still. Something in Amy's room was on fire.

Flying back in her own room, with no thought of fear now, Iolanthe seized her study-table and, dragging it to Amy's door, mounted it, and looked in the transom. Oh, horror! her fears were realized. Amy's dress, which was lying on a chair dangerously close to the fire, had ignited, and the clothes at the foot of the bed had also caught fire, and the flames were fast creeping up the coverlid

towards Amy's long blonde hair that floated down over her shoulders.

"Oh, God! help me to save her," prayed Iolanthe, as, seizing the door-knob, she shook it vigorously, pounding on the door with all her might; but fright had taken away her strength, and the knock was but feeble.

"Amy! Amy!" she cried; but for once her voice refused to obey her, and only a hoarse whisper came from the white lips. "Oh, what shall I do?" she panted in despair, as she looked desperately around for some means of help. If she waited to alarm any one, the flames would reach Amy's face before they could save her.

Suddenly a thought struck the girl. The transom! Hastily springing again to the table, she tried to push open the little window, but it was fastened. There was no time to be lost. Already the treacherous flames were very near Amy's white hand that lay outside the coverlet, and would soon clutch the lovely silken tresses in their relentless grasp. The smoke was becoming denser every minute, and would suffocate its lovely victim if something was not done quickly.

Striking the glass with her delicate hands, cutting them cruelly, some of the flying glass imbedding itself in her face, Iolanthe reached her hand through the aperture and unlocked the transom. Thrusting it hastily aside, she tried to push

herself through. Every nerve was strained to the utmost; the veins swelled out on her forehead as though they would burst; her breath came in short, quick gasps, and all the while she kept her dilated, anxious eyes on the great fiery tongue that threatened every moment to lap up a human life.

The transom was not very wide, and Iolanthe being rather a large girl, it took hard working to climb through, but at last, with one great effort, she sprang to the floor in Amy's room. She unlocked the door and threw it wide open; then rushing to the bedside and throwing back the burning covers, she seized the unconscious Amy in her arms, and with almost supernatural strength carried her across the hall into her own room. Then she sped quickly down the long, dark stairs to the lower hall, where the great bell was hanging. More than once she stumbled, twice she fell, striking her head against the sharp edges of the steps, but she sprang up again and hurried on to the end of the hall. She grasped the bell-rope, and a moment later the loud, deep clanging filled the house, arousing its sleeping inmates. Doors opened on either side, and out rushed the frightened, wondering girls, carrying their lamps in hands that trembled so they could scarcely hold them. Mrs. Barrett, clad in a hastily-donned wrapper, came rushing up-stairs, followed by a train of excited teachers and servants.

"In heaven's name, Iolanthe! what is the matter?" she exclaimed at sight of the white, blood-stained face and head and strangely glittering eyes.

The girl's lips moved convulsively in a vain effort to speak; the bleeding hands tried to relax their hold of the rope and point upwards, but she could not move: every muscle was paralyzed. Her teeth locked together with a harsh, grating sound; the wild eyes seemed to set in their sockets; the bruised, wounded head fell backwards, and Iolanthe would have fallen to the floor had not Miss Hadley sprang forward and caught her, and just at that moment a crowd of pale-faced girls came flying down-stairs exclaiming, "Oh, Mrs. Barrett! for heaven's sake come up here! Amy's room is on fire, and she is lying on Iolanthe's bed unconscious."

Mrs. Barrett, followed by Bess and one or two others, went directly up to the scene of the conflagration. Amy's door being open gave the fire a draft, and the room was rapidly filling with smoke and flames. Amy herself was lying on Iolanthe's bed unharmed, except a few slight burns on one hand, but unconscious, owing to the fact that she had inhaled a good portion of the smoke.

Mrs. Barrett issued an order to the servants, who had come up-stairs after her, to bring buckets

of water and subdue the fire before it did any further damage, and then with Bess's help carried Amy down-stairs.

The two girls were taken into Mrs. Barrett's room and the doctor sent for, and he came a few moments after, bringing his assistant with him.

After an hour's vigorous treatment Amy relieved their anxiety by opening her heavy eyes, but do what they would with Iolanthe she would revive only for a few moments and then relapse into unconsciousness again. Her wounds had been carefully attended to, but a large black-and-blue protuberance on the fair temple and another at the side of her head caused the doctor to look grave. He did not say much, but the next day when he came asked Mrs. Barrett if she wished Iolanthe to be removed from the school, as the indications were that she would have a long, serious illness. A despatch had already been sent to Iolanthe's aunt, with whom she lived, but an answer came back from one of the servants that Mrs. Wyville had gone away, they knew not where, to spend the winter, and they did not know just when she would be back; so it was plain that Iolanthe could not be sent home, and when the doctor asked his question Mrs. Barrett was silent for a moment. There was no place to send the girl, for there were no hospitals any nearer than C——, but it would be very inconvenient to have her at the school.

Amy, who was standing by, unexpectedly came to the rescue. Her proud heart had been deeply touched by Iolanthe's heroism and unselfishness, and more especially because of the circumstances surrounding them. She now said, "If Mrs. Barrett is willing for Miss Wyville to remain here, I will be only too glad to engage a nurse for her."

So after some consultation it was decided that Iolanthe should remain at the seminary, and the doctor promised to send up the best professional nurse in Hillsboro'. His predictions were true, for Iolanthe had a long, hard illness. Typhoid fever the doctor pronounced it, and he said it had not been altogether brought about by the excitement attending the fire, but that it had been hurried on and greatly strengthened by the strain on her whole system that terrible night.

The girls were not allowed to see Iolanthe, much as they wanted to; in fact, no one was allowed in the sick-room except the nurse and Amy, who spent all her spare time at the bedside of her preserver, and occasionally the teachers.

Five long, weary weeks went by, and at last the crisis came. There was no one with the sick girl except Amy and the nurse when the dread moment arrived, but several of the girls, together with Mrs. Metz-Beck, were anxiously waiting in the hall. Jocelyn, who had fulfilled Bess's proph-

ecy and become thoroughly ashamed of her unkind words, hung around the door in an agony of impatience and fear.

The doctor had said the turning-point would be at twelve o'clock noon, and as the clock in the sick-room slowly ticked away the minutes a solemn silence fell on the two watchers. Amy sat close by the bed, her eyes bent intently on the sick girl's face, her breath scarcely more than a faint heaving of the proud bosom, as she waited in suspense for the fated hour.

As the hands of the clock pointed to the hour of twelve Iolanthe opened her eyes and looked up at the anxious face bending above her. Only two words came faintly from between the dry lips, but they were enough: "Why, Amy!"

With a glad prayer of thanksgiving in her heart Amy knelt beside the bed, and, putting her arms tenderly about Iolanthe, sealed the wondering mouth with a warm, fervent kiss.

I cannot tell you how the joyful news was received by the other inmates of the school, but there were many thankful hearts, and faces brighter than they had been for some time, that assembled around the dinner-table that day.

It was several weeks before Iolanthe was able to be out of her room, and when she made her first tour around the school it was under Amy's protecting guidance. A love had grown up be-

tween the two girls that was as strong as their former dislike had been. Iolanthe had confided to Amy that the lisp in her speech had been affected, that her aunt had said it was stylish and rather fascinating, and so, having once begun, Iolanthe did not dare stop for fear the girls would make fun of her, when otherwise they might think her defective pronunciation was perfectly natural.

Soon after this Amy gave her brave rescuer a ring in token of her love and gratitude, and as it was rather unique in its way, I am sure my readers would all like a description of it.

It was a narrow band of the purest gold. In the centre was the initial "I" in frosted gold; on each side of the letter were set four precious gems, the initial letters of which, together with the capital I, formed the word gratitude. On the left of the initial was set first a garnet, then a ruby, next an amethyst, and lastly a topaz. On the right of the initial the stones were in this order, turquoise, uranite, diamond, and emerald. On the inside of the ring was engraved Iolanthe's name and the date of the fire.

Iolanthe knew not what to say when this little token was presented to her. She could only hug the donor most rapturously, and resolved in her heart to try and be well worthy of so much love and praise.

CHAPTER XVII.

ST. VALENTINE.

ONE day, a week or so before the 14th of February, a laughable little incident occurred in the school. It happened at the dinner-table in this wise. As bad luck would have it, Bess took the seat next to Mr. Schenk. Every one knew that this seat belonged to Miss Shrumberger, or, rather, knew that she had taken possession of it, and a few of the girls tried by various grimaces, when Mrs. Barrett was not looking, to apprise Bess of her mistake. But she seemed blissfully ignorant of it all, and for once Mr. Schenk's face had lost the look of dread that usually haunted it, and was replaced by one of genuine relief.

Miss Shrumberger for a wonder had not made her appearance as yet, and some fun was anticipated when she did arrive on the scene, for she had labelled Mr. Schenk as her own personal property, and any one who dared any liberties with her "slave," as the girls called him, was pretty sure to be making himself the subject for a fierce quarrel, for Miss Shrumberger was a lady who cared

not what she did when her temper was aroused. And so, knowing all this, the girls waited impatiently, but anxiously on Bess's account, for the teacher.

They had not long to wait, for scarcely five minutes passed after they had assembled at the table when Miss Shrumberger appeared in the door-way. As she cast her eyes down the long line of girls they dilated with anger, and the girls could have sworn that sparks of fire flashed from them. Her florid face turned a deeper scarlet, her mouth shut tightly, and she seemed like a wild-cat about to seize upon a poor, little, innocent dove. She opened her mouth as if about to speak, when Mrs. Barrett's voice, calm and stern, sounded:

"Miss Shrumberger, tardiness is punishable in a teacher as well as a scholar. You will be excused from attending your class this afternoon."

The rebuke, as well as its publicity, stung Miss Shrumberger to greater anger. She simply bowed in an abrupt manner in answer to Mrs. Barrett, and walking down the room until she came to where Bess and the professor were sitting, exclaimed, in a voice so choked with anger that she could hardly articulate,—

"Miss Grahame! How *dare* you? how *dare* you do such a thing?"

Bess looked at her for a moment, and then in-

quired, coolly, "May I ask what you mean, Miss Shrumberger?"

"You know well enough what I mean. You ugly, impudent wretch! how *dare* you?" retorted the irate teacher.

"Oh! You mean that I have unwittingly stolen your property?" said Bess, rising. "I beg your pardon, Miss Shrumberger, but if you do not want your possession tampered with you will have to hang a placard round his neck, 'Taken. No skylarking allowed here under the full penalty of the law.' Again, with all my heart, I beg your pardon, and most willingly resign your property into your hands. I trust you will find him unharmed; but if such be not the case, I will gladly pay all damages."

She turned the chair around for the amazed teacher to take, and, with a very polite bow, walked to her seat.

"You—you—brazen——" began Miss Shrumberger, almost beside herself with rage.

"That will be sufficient, Miss Shrumberger," interrupted Mrs. Barrett, with whom the German teacher was no favorite. "Miss Grahame has my approbation in all that she said."

"Do you allow a scholar to insult a teacher?" demanded the astonished Miss Shrumberger.

"Certainly not; but when a teacher insults a scholar, the latter has a right to retaliate."

"You will admit, though, that Miss Grahame's remarks were impudent and insulting," persisted the teacher, not willing to give up in favor of the enemy.

"I admit that they were partly, but your words were equally insulting. However, we will have no more words on that score. You will please to be seated, Miss Shrumberger, and if there is anything more to say on the subject it can be said after dinner."

Miss Shrumberger was forced to obey without any more ado, but she fairly glowered at Bess all through dinner, for she considered her the source of all the trouble. But that young lady enjoyed it hugely, and was already weaving a scheme in her fertile brain,—a scheme to be carried out in the near future. It seemed to afford her considerable amusement, for several times that afternoon an involuntary smile crossed her face.

As for Mr. Schenk himself, he considered the affair as ridiculous, and was more disgusted than ever with Miss Shrumberger. So much so was he that he barely treated the lady with civility. She felt his slights very much; she knew she had fallen considerably in his estimation, and she could have choked Bess with right good will had she dared.

She tried various means to bring about a reconciliation between herself and Mr. Schenk, and

failing in that, adopted another method entirely, and became as cool as an icicle towards her former love. Everything the pair could do to spite each other was done, much to the amusement of the girls, who, of course, all heartily sided with Bess.

So things went on in this state, and Valentine's day arrived. The girls were allowed only a half holiday, and they improved it to the best of their ability. Early in the morning a knock sounded on Mr. Schenk's door, but when he opened it not a soul was visible, but on the floor, at his feet, reposed a small, square box. The teacher took it up. It was addressed, in a strange, sprawling hand, to

"MR. JUPITER SCHENK.

"Compliments of St. Valentine."

"Who can it be from?" mused Mr. Schenk, shutting his door and turning the little package over and over. Having exhausted his conjectural powers, he concluded to open the box and see what it contained.

He carefully untied the wrapping-string and lifted up the lid, when—presto! something struck him square in the face, causing him to jerk back his head and drop the box. He stared blankly at nothing for a few moments, and then the thought struck him that perhaps his valentine was a "Jack-in-the-box," or some other similar arrange-

ment, so he examined it. But no, the little box was entirely empty, and Mr. Schenk gazed at it in utter bewilderment.

"Then what was it?" he asked himself.

A tiny squealing came from a corner of the room, as if in answer to his mental question. He followed up the sound, and discovered a little, dark body, with a long slim tail, protruding from a hole in the base-board.

Aha! the mystery was solved. It was a mouse that had sprung at him from the box, and, in trying to escape from the room, had caught itself fast in the opening.

Mr. Schenk pulled his rather unwilling valentine cautiously out by the tail, and, after some difficulty, succeeded in fastening it once more in its receptacle. Then he once more racked his brains to discover, if possible, who was the mysterious donor. After a great deal of conjecturing he finally settled on Miss Shrumberger as the guilty party.

The more he thought of it the more probable it seemed that she was the one. Then the professor's anger rose against her.

"She has done it for spite, and, perhaps, to make me think that Miss Grahame sent it," he soliloquized. "But I might have recognized that sprawl if I had thought a second time. But I will send her gift back to her."

So the irate professor pasted a slip of paper over the address on the box-lid, and directed it to Miss Shrumberger.

"I'll present it to her in the same manner she presented it to me," he went on to himself, as he went out in the hall; and, slipping cautiously along until he came to Miss Shrumberger's door, he deposited the little box in front of it, and, knocking sharply on the casement, hurried away before he should be discovered.

What Miss Shrumberger said or did on opening the box was never known. She recognized Mr. Schenk's handwriting, and her wrath at the supposed insult he offered her knew no bounds. She resolved to take no notice of it, however, but treat the ungentlemanly gentleman with silent contempt.

The girls were not allowed to receive any valentines except from their immediate relatives. Mabel received three or four from home and one from Guy, and in the afternoon a flat box arrived for Bess. It was from Morton, and on being opened was found to contain not only valentines for Bess and Mabel from him, but one for Bess and two for Mabel from Will. A note from Morton explained Will had sent his valentines from West Point to him (Mort) at his college, and he was to send them with his own to insure their safe arrival at the seminary.

They were perfectly lovely, especially Mabel's, and Bess teased her most unmercifully about it.

"But he sent you one, too," Mabel said, in self-defence.

"Oh, he sent me one so it wouldn't look too shabby, but he took care to send you two of the nicest ones that he could possibly find. You needn't try to 'cod' me, my dear, for I can see through his little trick."

Mabel made no answer, and pretended to be very angry. She turned her head away, but Bess put an arm about her neck and looked laughingly into the blue eyes.

> "Don't be angry with me, darling,
> Smile your brightest, sweetest smile,"

she sang, and Mabel smiled into the bright, saucy face.

"You dear old goose! did you think I could possibly be angry with you?"

"I did not know, for I was not sure how long you could stand teasing of that kind."

"Just as long as you can tease," answered Mabel. "As long as I am not hit I don't mind."

Just here Iolanthe entered. She had not entirely recovered from her illness, but was so much improved every way that her old friends would scarcely have recognized her.

"Oh, girls, I want to tell you something!" she

exclaimed; and now that the silly lisp was no longer affected her voice was really very sweet and musical.

"What is it?" cried Bess and Mabel in a breath, for Iolanthe's eyes were dancing with fun.

"Don't you think Mr. Schenk sent Miss Shrumberger a mouse in a box this morning!" continued Iolanthe, in the tone of one who was imparting a wonderful piece of news.

"How did you find it out?" asked Bess, who did not look as though she were greatly surprised.

"Clara went in her room shortly after it came, and she told her. Miss Shrumberger is awfully furious over it, and snapped me off like fun when I asked her if she received any valentines. I thought the look she gave me would surely cut me in two." And Iolanthe laughed merrily at the recollection.

Bess made her no answer, but she looked immensely pleased over something, and pursed up her lips in a queer little way that made Iolanthe regard her suspiciously for half a second.

"I believe *you* know something about that mouse, Bess Grahame!" she cried.

Bess looked at her.

"*I?* How should I know anything about it? I am not responsible for other people's valentines."

"You're dreadfully innocent, aren't you?" re-

turned Iolanthe. "Come, now, confess that you sent Miss Shrumberger his mouseship. Don't be backward about it. You know an open confession is good for the soul."

"Very well, then," cried Bess, triumphantly, "I will confess that I did *not* send Miss Shrumberger a mouse-valentine. I did not know until you came in that she had received one of any kind."

"And I'll vouch for the truth of that assertion," added Mabel.

Iolanthe looked from one to the other for a moment.

"I'm almost inclined to believe you," she said, at last; "but still I *know* you had *something* to do with it. I feel it in my bones."

"You are silenced but not convinced, is that it?" asked Mabel.

Here Bess very adroitly turned the conversation on some other subject; but when Iolanthe was gone, she said to Mabel,—

"Well, Mab, my stone killed two birds;" adding to herself, "which was just what I intended it to do."

CHAPTER XVIII.

COMMENCEMENT.

ONCE more it was June; once more the air was balmy and flower-laden; and as the gentle, morning sun-rays shone through the window of No. 8 they fell on Mabel's bright head, bowed low over some neatly-written pages of manuscript.

It was graduation-day, and she was putting the finishing strokes to her essay. She had come out with high honors, winning the unalloyed praise of both teachers and schoolmates, for they were all very fond of the sweet-faced girl and were proud of her success.

Twenty of the girls were to graduate, but only a small number were to read essays. Among them were our two girls, Amy, Lou, Connie, and Iolanthe, for the latter had studied hard during and since her convalescence, and, it was thought, would win the silver medal.

Mabel wrote rapidly for a few moments, and then, with a sigh of satisfaction, she laid down her pen and looked across at Bess, who was also

finishing up her essay. A tinge of sadness clouded the fair face, for on the morrow she and Bess were to part,—perhaps for years, may be forever,—and involuntarily her eyes filled with tears.

Suddenly Bess looked up. "There!" she exclaimed, "I'm done;

> 'And happy, too,
> That I can view
> My task, all now completed——'

Why, Queen Mab, what is the matter? You look as solemn as an owl."

"Nothing," was the answer. "I'm through with my essay also," she went on, hastily, bending over her work for fear Bess might see the tell-tale tears.

"Are you? Then put it aside, and we'll have a nice, long talk."

A tap at the door, and Clara entered.

"Cousin Samie wants you down in the parlor," she said to Mabel.

Her voice sounded a little oddly, and she looked as though she knew something she would not tell; but Mabel was not suspicious, and hurried downstairs as quickly as possible.

"It is something about my essay, no doubt," she thought. The parlor-door was closed, and without knocking Mabel pushed it open and entered. The room was empty, and she stood gazing around in surprise.

"Perhaps she meant her own parlor, Mabel thought, turning to go out again; and just then some one sprang at her from behind the door, and she was clasped rather tightly round the neck, while a joyous voice shouted, "Didn't we s'prise you? I knew we would."

"*Lilly!*" exclaimed Mabel, in pleased surprise, "and mamma," as she caught sight of a tall figure in the background, "and I declare Guy, too!" as that young man came laughingly forward.

"Well, if I just ain't too glad to see you," she continued, as she hugged and kissed them all round. "Are there any more of you? aren't papa and Ed hiding somewhere?"

"Papa and Ed couldn't come," said Lilly. "Are you glad to see us? You don't know what we've brought you."

"Lilly, hush," said her mother, "or you will tell Mabel after all."

"Oh, I ain't going to let the cat out of the bag," answered Lilly, with a reassuring air. "Are you glad we came?" she demanded again of Mabel.

"Didn't I tell you I was? I am ever so glad you came, mamma," she went on, turning to her mother, "for now you will see the school and all the girls."

"Are you going to read a piece?" asked Lilly.

"Mab, do sit down and tell us all about it, or Lil will give you no rest," said Guy, laughing.

So Mabel sat down, and for the next half-hour

talked, as Lilly said, a "straight streak of lightning;" then she exclaimed, "Now, mamma, you must see Bess, and I know you'll say she's the dearest, sweetest girl that ever lived. You wait here and I'll go bring her right down."

She hurried out of the room and up-stairs, dashing into her room in a manner that caused Bess to look up with a boyish, "Whew! one would think you were pursued by the furies."

"Oh, Bess! you can't guess who's come? mamma, Guy, and Lilly, and I've come for you to go down and see them. Don't wait a minute; they are all so anxious to see you." And in her excitement Mabel threw her arms round Bess's neck and imprinted two or three kisses on the rounded cheeks. "No, you must not even brush your hair," for Bess, with true girlish concern for her appearance, had turned to survey herself in the mirror; "you are just perfectly lovely as you are, with all those little curls blowing about your face. Don't stop for anything, for I can scarcely wait until you see each other." And, drawing Bess's hand within her arm, Mabel escorted her in proud triumph to the parlor.

Mrs. Stewart arose at their entrance, and Mabel, leading her friend to her, exclaimed, "There is no use to present her, mamma; just take her and hug her."

With a smile Mrs. Stewart took Bess in her

arms and pressed a motherly kiss on the warm lips. "My dear," she said, "I have heard so much of you that I know you already, and I am heartily glad to meet you."

"Thank you," answered Bess, simply.

Guy was next presented, and as he bowed politely over the plump hand extended to him he thought, with an involuntary smile, of his first meeting with the saucy school-girl.

Lilly, with a sudden feeling of shyness, had retired to a distant part of the room, and came up rather reluctantly to be introduced; but Bess's affectionate greeting put her at her ease at once, and she immediately fell deeply in love with "the darling thing," as she called her sister's friend.

Mrs. Barrett entered presently, and very kindly showed the visitors all over the seminary, and then insisted on their partaking of some refreshments in her own parlor; so that it was past noon before they finally left for the hotel, taking Mabel with them.

It had been with feelings of secret dismay and sorrow that the young girl had learned the fact that she was expected to accompany them, for she had anticipated spending that last day with Bess. She would not see her again for so long, she argued to herself, and she would be with her mother and the others every day after that. Then she reproached herself for such a wicked thought. Was

not her mother more to her than Bess? and her first duty, as well as love, must be to her; but, notwithstanding, Mabel could not keep back the disappointed tears as she packed her trunk in her own room with Bess standing by, helping, and laughing and joking, as lively as ever. She was not very demonstrative in her joys or sorrows, and although she said nothing about it, was as loath to part with Mabel as the latter was with her. "I'll see you again to-night," she said, as she bade her good-by, and Mabel hurried away, stopping as she reached the head of the stairs for a last, long look of No. 8, where she had spent so many happy hours. "Good-by, dear old room," she said; then something came before her vision, and turning resolutely, she ran quickly down-stairs. At the foot she encountered Miss Hadley. The dearly-loved teacher gave her a tender farewell.

"You must write to me often, Mabel dear," she said, "for I shall feel very lonesome with so many of my old scholars gone."

"Indeed I will, dear Miss Hadley. I will not let a week pass without writing to you, and you must be sure to spend your next vacation with us. We would all be *so* glad to have you."

"Thank you; I should love to come. You know, of course, that Bess and Amy have very kindly invited me to divide this vacation between them, and I have accepted, very thankful to them

for the pleasure they have given me. But I see your little sister is anxiously waiting for you in Mrs. Barrett's door, so once more good-by. We shall meet again to-night."

As they drove away in the hack that Mrs. Barrett had insisted on their taking, Mabel discovered a crowd of laughing girls waving her adieu from the upper hall window. She looked wistfully back until the merry group and the seminary were hidden from her sight.

Glad though she was to be with her mother once more, Mabel was not entirely happy that afternoon at the hotel. Her thoughts *would* stray back to Bess, and in imagination she lived over again the past happy weeks, and gave such haphazard answers to her mother's questions that that good lady looked at her in silent amazement. Lilly's childish chatter became really tiresome, and more than once the elder sister felt tempted to make her keep quiet, but the hours wore on, and the much-longed-for night came at last.

The commencement exercises were to be held in the Music Hall, and promptly at half-past six the carriage containing the "sweet girl graduates" deposited them at the private entrance to the stage. Guy escorted his sister to the door of the dressing-room, and then left her to join his mother and Lilly in the auditorium.

In the green-room Mabel found Bess and some

more half-dozen of her classmates giving the final touches to their toilets before the long, gilt-framed mirrors. She was greeted with merry sallies from the gay party, and, after arranging her own costume, they proceeded on the stage.

The school-girls were all there, seated in graduating rows behind the great curtain, which was not to be lifted until time for the exercises to commence. Mrs. Barrett was there also, going from one to the other to make sure that they were all right, and giving final admonitions respecting their behavior and courage, and then retired to the proscenium-box, where all the teachers were seated.

Bess and Mabel occupied seats next to each other, and many were the whisperings and gigglings that went on while the gay bevy waited for the important moment, screened by the friendly curtain. One girl had brought a box of candy, and passed it around to her mates. It was returned to her empty, and she raised a small howl at the discovery, for she had neglected to supply herself before any of the others.

Lou ventured to take a sly peep at the audience through a small hole in the curtain.

"Oh, girls!" she exclaimed, in an undertone, "it's just full, and more keep coming."

"Oh, dear," said Connie, "just think of having a whole houseful of people staring at you! I

know I shall faint when my turn comes to read."

"Better faint now and have it over with, because you might scare somebody in the audience," said Jocelyn, sarcastically.

A bell tinkled as she spoke. That was a signal for order, and there was a general stir among the girls as they settled back to their places. Five minutes more passed, and promptly at seven o'clock the curtain rolled slowly up. There was a little flutter among the essayists as it did so, for the house was packed as full as it could hold.

The stage was decorated most profusely and artistically with flowers, and looked like a perfect hot-house. The seminary girls had always had a reputation for beauty among the Hillsboroites, and never had they looked more charming than they did now, and they were greeted with an enthusiastic clapping of hands.

The first thing on the programme was a chorus, led by Professor "Mullenstalk." They got along excellently without any male voices, and were warmly applauded. Then Bess came forward. Mr. Schenk was master of ceremonies, and led out the girls, and Amy expressed the sentiments of them all when she declared that she would rather walk out with a stick than him.

He now offered Bess his arm with a very polite bow, carried her manuscript for her, and even in-

troduced her to the audience, although each one had a dainty, scented programme.

The subject Bess had chosen was "Human Nature." It was treated in true scholarly style, sparkling with wit, brilliant, and full of sly hits at the peculiarities of some people. It was greeted with loud applause, and the glory-crowned authoress returned, triumphant, to her seat.

Mabel glowed with pride at her friend's success, and squeezed the white-gloved hand, with the whispered remark,—

"You dear Grahame Gem; I *knew* they would like it. Just hear them; you'll have to go back."

And Bess did have to go back, more than once, and bow her acknowledgments. Connie's turn came next. She did not faint as she had predicted, but she trembled as she walked forward, and her voice faltered over the first few lines of her essay. She gained confidence as she went along, and came out bravely, received her share of applause, and retired, feeling that she had done credit to her family. Then followed other essays, intermingled with singing and playing. Professor "Mullenstalk's" pupils acquitted themselves right admirably, especially Amy, who responded to as many as five encores.

Mabel read her essay splendidly. The title was "Dreams," and it was evident to her hearers

from the way she handled it that she was thoroughly conversant with her subject. Her proud mother surveyed her through a mist of happy tears, and Guy heard with brotherly pride more than one compliment passed on his pretty sister.

Iolanthe came next to the last. Her paper was on "Affectation," and more than once, the girls knew, she referred to herself. As she made her final bow and turned to go, she was intercepted by Bess, who was led forward by the gallant Mr. Schenk. In her hand she carried a gold medal, suspended from a broad, blue ribbon.

"Wait a moment," she said, placing a detaining hand on Iolanthe's arm; and then facing the audience, who were wondering what was going to happen, she told them the story of the fire,—Iolanthe's heroism, and her goodness of heart in saving one with whom she was at enmity,—and ended by saying that they wished to acknowledge publicly the noble, unselfish act. Then, turning to the surprised Iolanthe, she added, "And I now, in behalf of the school, present Miss Iolanthe Wyville with this medal in honor of her brave deed, which won the deep love and respect of both her teachers and school-mates." And, advancing to Iolanthe, she hung the blue ribbon with its precious weight around her neck.

Iolanthe was completely at a loss what to say or do. She looked first at Bess, then at the girls,

and then at the medal. A deep scarlet flashed into her cheeks and out again, leaving them deathly pale. She opened her lips as if to speak but could not, and simply bowing, first to the cheering audience then to the group of teachers, and lastly to the girls, she hid her face in her hands and began to weep and laugh hysterically. Bess led her back to her seat, where Amy received her with tear-dimmed eyes, and, putting her arm affectionately around her friend, she drew her head close to her heart. But Iolanthe had to go back and bow again before the audience would be satisfied, and the applause, in which the school-girls joined, was deafening. It seemed to fairly shake the building, and when it had at last subsided Amy came forward to deliver the valedictory.

To say that it was good would be wide of the truth: it was simply *grand.* At one moment the audience would be listening with tearful eyes, and the next they would be almost convulsed with laughter. Amy spoke touchingly of the bond of love that united the class, comparing it to a golden-linked chain, of which she said one link had been severed here on earth only to unite them to that great eternal Love which is in heaven. As she finished and made her farewell bow, bouquets and cheers were showered upon her from all sides. After it was all over Mrs. Barrett came upon the stage and awarded the medals. Amy, as every

one had expected, received the gold one, and Bess the silver. Each one of the graduates also received an abundance of flowers, and went back to the seminary feeling supremely happy in her success.

The parting between Mabel and her classmates was most tender and affectionate. There were vows of eternal friendship, promises of letters and visits, and a few little presents, trifling in themselves but precious in the eyes of the recipients, were exchanged between them.

Mabel clung to Bess until the last moment, and the final parting with her was the hardest of all. It is not for us to intrude upon the separation of two dear friends, and suffice it to say that Mabel cried herself to sleep that night, and there was something very like tears in Bess's eyes as she sought her couch in her lonely room.

The Stewarts took the early morning train for Lowe-land, and as the seminary girls were not to start until afternoon, Mabel saw no more of them. How anxiously did she wait for Bess's first letter, which came the week after the writer arrived home! It filled two sheets of rather large note-paper, and was so bright and sparkling that it seemed as if Bess herself had stepped from the square, white envelope.

Letters came from Lou and Connie the same day. They gave many gay reminders, and were

so chatty and lively in general that Mabel almost imagined herself back at the seminary living the old happy life over again. But imagination is not reality, and sometimes it is best for us that it is not, because we often imagine things that look to us with our limited vision perfectly grand and charming, but if carried into execution would prove an utter ruin to our happiness.

So Mabel settled to home-life once more, and soon found much to interest and instruct her. She finally became used to being without Bess, and after all occasional separations are a good thing, even for the best of friends. There is a dangerous monotony in being together too much, and were it not for the transient partings in this life, however painful they may be at the time, there could be no joyful reunions, and no long delicious talks such as friends delight in.

CHAPTER XIX.

ONE YEAR AFTER.

It was a warm, sunny day in September. A soft mellow haze hung over all the land, and even the sun seemed to partake of the general dreaminess of old Nature, and beat his rays down less fiercely upon her smiling face.

It was that kind of a day in which you feel like doing nothing but sit in the shade with the most interesting book that can be found, or swing lazily in a hammock under some wide-spreading tree, and let the soft, sweet wind blow your hair about your face and gently flutter your eyelids down over eyes that *would* go to sleep for almost nothing.

Come with me down a wide, shady street to a large brick house, with broad stone steps and a cool, pleasant veranda. Lovely flowers filled the high, wide windows, and graced the smooth, velvety lawn in front. A narrow, gravelled path led from the iron gate to the porch, and a wide drive curved around the side of the house.

In a bay-window at the right of this pleasant residence, in the midst of a fragrant bower of

roses and delicate ivy-leaves, swung a yellow canary in a dainty gilded cage. Large green maples threw a cool shade across the lawn, and the breeze that gently stirred the filmy curtains wafted to the passer-by the sweet odor of the flowers, mingled with the silvery notes of the canary.

Through the window came also the sound of a piano, and a girlish voice counting "one, two, three," could be distinctly heard.

Sitting on the veranda-steps, her hands clasped idly in her lap, a large straw hat shading her face, is a young girl. As we look at her we are impressed with the idea that she is not an entire stranger to us. Somewhere before have we seen that fair, blonde face, with its sweet, gentle expression, and those clear blue eyes, that look out straight and unflinchingly from under the arched brows; and surely this is not the first time that we have seen those light, golden braids that are bound so smoothly about the small, shapely head, and we can remember distinctly of having seen that slender, graceful form somewhere in the near past.

"Who can she be?" is the question that we puzzle over, but as we gaze at the young girl a few moments longer light suddenly dawns upon our minds. Ah! now we know. One year has not changed Mabel Stewart so much but that her

old friends can recognize her. It is the same Mabel that we used to know, except that she is one year taller.

She is as girlish, impulsive, and undignified as ever, and just as much given to falling in love as she was when we first met her.

She is now anxiously waiting for the postman, who, she knows, will be sure to bring her a letter from Bess. The thought of Bess always brought back the old school-days, and Mabel had gone to dreaming of that happy time that would never come again for her. All the old scenes and incidents,—the fire; Iolanthe's bravery; Bess's many freaks; the S. P. C. S.,—all passed in a living panorama before her mental gaze. She could distinctly hear the solemn tolling of the bell as Nell's funeral cortege wound slowly into the church-yard, and tears involuntarily filled her eyes as in memory she looked for the last time on the peaceful face.

A gay, breezy galop broke suddenly, almost harshly, upon her revery, rousing her to a sense of the present.

"Lil, you naughty child," she exclaimed, in a tone that was half reproachful, "you ought to be shaken! You have spoiled my dream."

"What, Mabel!" And a merry-faced girl of eleven, with long, loose curls flying about her shoulders, came to the window. "Dreaming this

lovely day! What has come over you?" Then, with a sudden twinkle of her bright eyes, "I say, Mab, you put me in mind of 'Little Sally Waters a-sitting in the sun.'" And she hummed a few bars of that charming song.

"Lil, what do you suppose papa would say if he was to hear you?" exclaimed Mabel.

"He would say——"

"That that is not the proper kind of a song for a young lady to be singing," interrupted a bass voice, and Dr. Stewart came around the corner of the house.

"Have you been playing eavesdropper all this while?" demanded Lilly, a little flush appearing in either cheek.

"No, ma'am; but I came up just in time to hear your song and Mabel's question. By the way, my 'lily maid,' where did you learn that little vocal gem?"

"At school. Fanny Bostwick learned it to me."

"*Learned* it to you, did she?" And the doctor's eyes twinkled mischievously.

"Papa, old Mrs. Jackson needs your attention immediately," answered Lilly, with a little pout of her rosy lips.

The doctor laughed at the artful answer, and disappeared into the house.

"The idea of a minister's daughter teaching

you such stuff as that!" exclaimed Mabel, when the sound of their father's footsteps died away.

"That isn't bad. Fan told me her papa said the little 'nigs' down South sing it at Christmas; besides, that isn't near so bad as some of the things you told me that Bess did," added Lilly, defending her bosom friend warmly.

"You never heard Bess use slang," answered Mabel, defending *her* friend just as warmly.

"I never *heard* her use anything; and I think papa will have to correct *your* grammar too, if you *did* go to boarding-school. Here comes the man in gray. I wonder—yes, sir, he has! He's coming here, Mabel, and there's your letter in his hand. Do hurry up and open it and tell me when she is coming, for

> 'I'm dying, I'm sighing
> To see this most wonderful Bess.'"

"Lilly! Lilly!" ejaculated Mabel once more. "How *often* must you be told that such songs are not proper for a young lady in private life to sing?"

"Goodness on us! If I don't adopt the stage as a profession, and *then* I can sing anything I please," answered Lilly, with some asperity.

"Mabel," inquired a voice from a window above them, "was that Mrs. Thompson's kitchen-girl I heard singing just now?"

"No, mamma, it was I," answered Lilly, running out to the gate and looking up at her mother. "Now don't predict that the gallows will be my end, like old Mr. Prangle does."

"What shall I do with you, Lilly?" returned her mother, shaking her head somewhat wofully, for the youngest of the Stewarts was a little inclined to be wild. Very high-spirited, possessed of a quick temper, and the least tiny bit self-willed; yet at the same time most lovable, very lady-like and polite in her manners, gentle and affectionate, and possessed of unusual intelligence for one so young. Her family were proud of her; proud of her shrewd, bright sayings and artful little ways of sliding out of tight corners, and exceedingly proud of the many talents which she exhibited. True to herself, she flashed back a half-saucy answer to her mother's question.

"Do with me, mamma?

'Feed me on love from your own heart, I ween,
With lots of big hugs, the biggest e'er seen,
With kisses for dessert, and then you'll soon see
That that is the best thing can be done with me.'"

"Lil, you little witch!" cried Mabel, laughing, while Mrs. Stewart drew her head in, vanquished for the moment.

All further remarks were cut short by the postman, who came across the street just then and handed Mabel a letter. She seized it eagerly; it

was addressed in Bess's well-known chirography. With a triumphant "I knew it!" Mabel tore it open. Three closely-written sheets met her view, and with a pleased smile she composed herself to read it. It was in Bess's usual flowing style, teeming with interest and good humor. Towards the close its writer said, "And now, Mab, don't faint or scream out at the astounding news,—I am at last coming to visit you."

A little cry of delight escaped the lips of the reader.

"What is it?" asked Lil, who had been anxiously watching each expression that flitted across her sister's face.

"Wait," was the rather unsatisfactory answer, and Mabel read on:

"You have invited me so many times, and I have refused every time, that I am almost ashamed to accept your invitation at this late day, but better late than never, and it was not unwillingness to come that prompted my refusals. I am so *very, very* anxious to see you that I shall count the moments as they fly. You may look for me on Tuesday, sure, on the St. Louis express. I think it arrives in St. Louis at seven P.M. I have *lots* to tell you, and a delightful plan to propose that you must not say no to; but I will not write much now because I shall see you so soon, and then I can talk to you, which is better than all the letter-

writing that ever was. I shall look for a postal from you right away. All send love. Mort is home on a short vacation, and sends his especial blessing. Always your own true Bess."

Hastily gathering up her letter, her face all aglow with pleasure, her lips wreathed in smiles, Mabel sprang in the hall and up the stairs more like a child of seven than a young lady of seventeen, crying, excitedly, "Mamma! mamma! listen here! What do you think?"

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Lil, as she ran to look after her sister. "She told me to wait until she got through, and now she goes spinning upstairs like a crazy person. I wonder—oh, I know!" clapping her hands: "that Bess is coming!" and she rushed after Mabel.

Mrs. Stewart looked up smilingly as Mabel burst into her room, followed by Lilly.

"My dear, what is it? Your eyes are like stars."

"Oh, mamma, Bess is coming!" began Mabel, breathless with excitement.

"I knew it! I knew it! Oh, goody!" interrupted Lilly, spinning top-like around the room, and winding up by falling in an exhausted little heap on the floor.

"When is she coming, Mabel?" asked her mother, laying aside her sewing and preparing to listen.

"Next Tuesday; but here, you may read the letter." And Mabel handed it to her.

"Let me see too," said Lilly, jumping up.

"No, my dear," answered her mother. "There may be something in the letter that Mabel would not wish you to read. You are not old enough to be let into all of her secrets yet."

"Oh, pshaw!" was the impatient rejoinder.

> "'When shall I be big enough?
> Do tell me exactly when,'"

she added, quoting from a piece she used to speak.

"Tuesday evening on the express," remarked Mrs. Stewart, as she finished reading the letter, and handed it back to Mabel.

"I don't see how I can possibly wait until that time," said the young girl, with a sigh.

"You will have to count the moments as they fly," answered Mrs. Stewart. "It may be some consolation to you to know Bess is doing the same; but you had better write your postal now, so it will be sure to get there before she starts."

"Let me post it!" cried Lilly, eagerly, starting for her hat.

"Yes, if you want to," answered Mabel, who felt in a humor to grant all requests that might be made of her.

The postal written, Lilly started off with it, singing as she went. Scarce had the echo of her

voice died away when a merry whistle was heard, and a stout, manly boy of thirteen entered the room.

"The top o' the marning to ye, marm," he said, with an awkward courtesy to Mrs. Stewart. "And how is your health this foine marning?" Then turning to Mabel, he added in a natural tone of voice, as he drew a note from his pocket, "Here, Mab, is a note from Mame Harrison, and she told me to tell you that you must be sure to go."

"What is it she wants you to do?" asked Mrs. Stewart, as Mabel read the little missive.

"To go riding with her this afternoon, and will call for me at two o'clock. I guess I'll go, as that will pass away one afternoon of my waiting time. Then I will only have three more before Bess comes."

"Is *she* coming?" asked Ed.

"Tuesday evening."

"Whew! what a meeting it will be! Two friends that haven't seen each other for the terribly long space of fifteen months. I shall cancel all of my other engagements so as to be present; but I almost forgot my principal errand in here. Ma,"—and he put his arm coaxingly around her neck,—"may I go fishing with Ed Parker? He's been waiting on me for over a week, and don't want to go without me."

"Oh, mamma, I *do* love you so!" said Mabel, teasingly.

"May I go, ma?" continued Ed, never heeding the interruption. "You're ever so much nicer than Frank Bates's ma, because she won't let Frank do hardly anything that he wants to, and——"

"Yes, you may go," said Mrs. Stewart, smiling into the eager face; "only be careful and don't get drowned."

> "'Yes, my darling brother;
> Hang your hat on a fishing-rod,
> But don't go near the water,'" —

sang a merry voice, as Lil entered the room.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Ed, waving his hat. "But I say, ma, I wish you'd fix me up a lunch, won't you? Ed's mother gave him one, and then I won't come back to dinner. Just anything, cookies or jumbles, or whatever you have, and I'll get the tackle while you're doing it." And the delighted youth sped out of the room.

"Mamma, I'm going down to the store with Fanny, may I?" chimed in Lilly, as her mother arose to follow Ed.

"Quite a novel way of asking permission," laughed Mabel.

"Come on, ma!" shouted a voice from the lower hall; "Ed's waiting for me."

"Can I, mamma? say yes," urged Lilly.

"Yes, yes!" answered Mrs. Stewart, covering up her ears in desperate haste; "only be careful. Yes, Ed, I'm coming." And the besieged lady hurried away, followed by Lilly.

As the seven o'clock express from —— steamed into the depot at St. Louis that same evening, a tall, rather plump young lady, attired in a dark-gray travelling costume, alighted upon the platform. She was a very handsome girl, with a dark, roguish face, great sparkling brown eyes, and a suspicion of dimples lurking at the corner of the mobile mouth.

She seemed to be thinking of something very pleasant, for every now and then a smile curved the ripe crimson lips. Signalling one of the many hackmen that crowded around, she asked him something, and after exchanging a few words, he seized her satchel and escorted her to his hack.

"Drive up as softly as you can," said his passenger, as he slammed the door and mounted his box.

"Yes, ma'am." He whipped up his horses, and away they rolled. It was dusk, and the lights from the stores and residences along the way gleamed invitingly out. The street-lamps were also lighted, and looked like so many huge stars as they flared and twinkled in the cool night wind.

As they advanced nearer and nearer to her destination, the young lady looked eagerly out of the carriage-window, the smile broadened, and the carnation deepened in the olive cheeks. They passed a physician's office; by the window, reading, was a dignified, pleasant-looking gentleman, with a long, dark beard, and a professional air. Outside the door a black sign announced in gold letters:

"DR. S. F. STEWART."

"There's his office," exclaimed the anxious traveller, "and that gentleman must be him. Now we surely can't be very far."

The driver cautiously whoa'd to his horses, the carriage went slower, and in a moment more stopped before a large brick house.

"You need not go in," said the young girl, as the driver helped her to alight, "for I want to surprise them, and I thank you very much for being so cautious. A quarter, I think you said."

"Yes, miss; thank you. Good-night, miss; hope you'll have a pleasant surprise." And, mounting to his seat again, he drove off.

The girl carefully opened the gate and stepped softly up the broad steps. The sitting-room curtains were not yet drawn, and through the window could be seen a very pleasant picture. A small fire burned cheerfully in the grate, for the even-

ings were cool, and around it were grouped Mrs. Stewart, Mabel, and Lilly. They seemed to be discussing a very interesting subject, for Mrs. Stewart was smiling and Mabel's face was full of excitement as she talked, and Lilly, on a low stool at her feet, sat with attentive, upturned face.

"She's telling something about me, I'll warrant," thought the observer, as she watched this little scene for a few moments.

She pulled the bell, and the inmates of the sitting-room bestirred themselves as the sharp ting-a-ling echoed through the hall.

"Let me go!" cried Lilly, springing up quickly, and intercepting Mabel. "I bet it's Fanny and Kate." She opened the hall-door, exclaiming, "I know you, you rogues; why didn't you——" She stopped short in confusion as she found herself face to face with a stranger. "Oh! excuse me——" she began, apologetically.

"Good-evening," said the young lady, in a constrained voice. "Does Dr. Stewart live here?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered Lilly. "Will you walk in?" she added, opening the door a little wider. The girl stepped inside, and Lilly, still wondering, for her father's patients never came to the house, pushed open the sitting-room door. "Come in here," she said.

Mrs. Stewart arose and advanced to meet the

stranger, who, strangely enough, seemed to prefer keeping in the background.

"Did you wish to see my husband?" she asked. "He is not in now, but will be presently, and if you will be seated——"

She was interrupted by a joyous cry from Mabel.

"Bess! Bess!"

She sprang forward, and the next moment the two girls were clasped in each other's arms in some inexplicable manner; as Lilly graphically described it, "one girl's head was on the other one's shoulder, and the other girl's head was on the other one's shoulder, and they were all mixed up somehow, so you couldn't tell t'other from which."

To use another of that precocious child's expressions, it was "like Babel let loose" for the next half-hour.

"Why didn't you tell me you were coming today instead of saying Tuesday, and keeping me in such suspense?" demanded Mabel.

"I didn't know it myself. After I sent your letter papa came in and told me if I came then I would have company, so I just packed my trunk and started, and, as they say in story-books, you know the rest."

"And I can't tell you how glad I am!" exclaimed Mabel, giving Bess's hand an ecstatic

squeeze. "But before we talk any more come up-stairs to *our* room and refresh yourself, for I know you are dusty and tired."

Mrs. Stewart smiled at the proud emphasis Mabel placed on "our room," and said to Bess,—

"This morning Mabel was sighing most disconsolately, and wondering how she could possibly spend the time until Tuesday, but now I fancy it will slip away most delightfully."

"It will go all too quickly," said Mabel. "I wish now that time was made of India-rubber, for then I would stretch out one day as long as three; but come on, my Gem, before we get to talking again." And Mabel led the way up-stairs to her own room.

It would be a waste of time and words to tell what Mabel and Bess did for the next few days. Every girl that has an intimate friend can guess what they would be most apt to do, so we will simply say that Bess's "delightful plan," which she soon disclosed, proved to be this: that, after her visit to Mabel was completed, they should go together to visit her (Bess's) aunt in Frederick City, Maryland.

It required considerable persuasion to induce Mrs. Stewart to consent to the trip. It was so far, she said, for two young girls to go alone; but they both declared they were used to travelling, and were entirely capable of taking care of them-

selves. Besides, Mrs. —— would be sure to meet them at Frederick, and there was not any danger in their staying at Baltimore overnight,—not the least; so after much coaxing and talking Mrs. Stewart was finally won over.

One morning, shortly after Bess's arrival, another pleasant surprise occurred for the Stewart family. It was nothing more or less than the appearance of Guy, who was studying for the bar in Washington, and had come home for a vacation of three weeks.

As may be supposed, he was quite pleased to see Bess, and had been home but a week when it became evident from his actions that something was the matter with him. He had always been fond of strolling out in the evenings,—down to his father's office, or else taking Lilly out for a little airing, as she called it,—but now his taste was entirely changed, and he seemed to prefer to stay at home and join the girls in their music or games, or sit in a quiet corner and watch the happy faces as they bent over some little articles of dainty work. He appeared to be an especial admirer of brunettes, for occasionally, when Bess would raise her luminous orbs to his handsome face, she would meet the glance of his audacious eyes, with something in their depths that caused her to quickly drop her own again to her work. If Mrs. Stewart thought anything, she kept her

suspicions to herself, but several times Bess would catch the lady looking at her with a peculiar expression that invariably brought a quick blush to the velvety cheeks.

Lilly's sharp eyes had discovered something amiss in her brother, and one evening, when they were all assembled in the sitting-room, and Bess was playing a wild, fast galop, she exclaimed,—

"I do believe Guy's in love! They say that people make regular geese of themselves at such times, and if any one could be more of a goose than Guy I'd like to see them. Why, to-day he actually——"

The music became louder than ever at this moment, and Mrs. Stewart silenced her talkative little daughter by saying,—

"Lilly, go up-stairs and bring down my sewing."

Lilly went, innocently wondering what her mother could want of her sewing at that particular moment, and when she came back Mabel, Bess, and Guy had disappeared. They had gone down-town Mrs. Stewart said in answer to Lilly's question, and when they came back that young lady had retired.

But Lilly was a sagacious child, and saw more than they thought she did, though she wisely refrained from any more remarks, and so the days wore on and the end of Guy's vacation approached.

The evening before his departure for Washington he invited Bess and Mabel to go buggy-riding with him. But Mabel, unfortunately, had a headache,—not so severe, however, as to allow of her staying home; but her far-seeing mother advised her not to go out in the night-air, but urged Bess to go without her; and although Guy expressed his regrets at being deprived of her company, I am afraid that his face did not wear a very despondent look as he drove away with Bess at his side, looking more fascinating than ever, if such a thing were possible.

It was late when they returned. Mabel, sitting by her own cosey fire waiting for her friend, heard them enter, but it was at least half an hour before Bess came up-stairs.

"Why!" she exclaimed, as she pushed open the door and discovered the solitary watcher. "You waiting, Mabel? I thought you would be fast asleep; and look at the time!—a quarter of eleven. You naughty girl! you ought to be scolded for sitting up so long; and with the headache, too. Is your head any better?" And Bess laid her hand caressingly on Mabel's forehead.

"Oh, yes; much better. Did you have a nice ride?"

"Delightful!" answered Bess, but her voice sounded rather peculiar, and Mabel looked at her suddenly. Bess's eyes were unusually brilliant,

and two deep spots of scarlet burned in either cheek, and her face had a soft, happy expression, different from any other it had worn. She returned Mabel's searching gaze steadily for a few moments, then her eyes dropped, and then, with a short, queer little laugh, turned away and commenced taking off her outside wraps.

Mabel, watching her slyly, saw her steal several furtive glances in her direction. Mrs. Stewart had confided something to her daughter that evening, and Mabel had been thinking of it ever since she came up-stairs. She tried to convince herself now that there was nothing the matter, but Bess certainly did act a little queer; just now she stood before the dressing-case as if undecided whether to speak or not, and Mabel, watching her face in the mirror, saw little flushes come and go in the rounded cheeks, and the faintest suspicion of a doubtful smile curved the crimson lips. She turned suddenly, and, coming up to Mabel, knelt by her side. Her manner was somewhat confused and hurried, and a deep blush suffused neck, cheek, and brow as she said, abruptly, though hesitatingly, "Mabel, how would you like to have me for a sister?"

"*You!*" exclaimed Mabel, half astonished, disappointed, and pleased all in one. "Do you need to ask that question, when you know I would be delighted almost out of my senses? But why

do you ask? Have you—— Ah, Bess!" as the blushes grew deeper and Bess hid her face in Mabel's lap to hide her embarrassment, "I half suspected as much."

"Did you guess it?" asked a smothered voice from the depths of Mabel's silk overskirt.

"Why, of course I did; your eyes told me before your mouth did."

"But did you before?"

"Well,—partly; but look up here until I see you." And Mabel gently lifted the bowed head. "You darling, *darling* creature!" she went on, as Bess's face, full of the most charming confusion, was uplifted to her own. "I'm ever and ever so glad; but I can scarcely realize it, and I know I shall be terribly jealous of you. The idea of you loving my brother more than you do me!"

"No, you won't," answered Bess. "I give you full permission to love my brother better than me if you like; but it will not change my love for you one bit; in fact, I will love you all the more, being your relation you know."

"You dear! Of course I am not going to envy my brother for gaining such a priceless jewel as you are; but, dear me! I can't realize it that you are engaged."

"Nevertheless it is true," said Bess, holding up her left hand, on which glittered the badge of

betrothal; "and can you withstand such positive proof as that?"

"No; but, all the same, I can hardly realize it."

Neither could the other members of the Stewart family when they heard the wonderful news the next morning. Even Guy could scarcely convince himself that he had at last won his much-longed-for treasure. Of course the lovers were left to themselves that morning, for it was Guy's last, and when he bade them all good-by that afternoon he was an entirely different man from the one that came three weeks before, for did he not have the sweet consciousness that his own betrothed bride stood on the steps waving him adieu? and did he not know that a pair of brown eyes would watch and wait eagerly for the first letter from their lover? and knowing all this, could he be anything else but a changed man?

As the little group on the porch turned into the house, after watching Guy out of sight, Lilly remarked, shaking her bright head wisely, "Well, you don't know what is going to happen next in this world. The things that you least suspect turn up, but then *I* knew it all the time."

CHAPTER XX.

AN EASTERN TRIP.

ONE bright morning in October, about two weeks after Guy's departure, an express-wagon might have been seen backing up in front of Dr. Stewart's residence, and a large trunk deposited therein. A few moments after, Dr. Stewart, carrying two valises, emerged from the hall-door, followed by two young ladies in travelling dresses. After them came Mrs. Stewart, Ed, and Lilly, the latter's bright face clouded at the thought of being separated from the girls for the long space of two weeks.

They stood talking on the steps until a carriage drove around the side of the house; then the good-byes were said, the last kisses given, and the trio entered the carriage and were driven rapidly off towards the depot.

"It seems as if we ought to be on our way to school," said Mabel, as they drove along.

"I'd like to give the old place a visit," said Bess. "How odd it would seem, though, to go there now, with everything so changed!" she went

on. "Hardly any of the old girls are there now."

"I wonder who has No. 8?" said Mabel, musingly.

"I hope its inmates are not like their predecessors," laughed Bess.

"Now, Bess, that isn't saying much for us. I'm sure no one could be any better than we were."

"Any worse, you mean," said Bess.

"Bess, you are dreadful. I gave the impression at home that I was a model of behavior, and you will make papa think that I am a fibber."

"*You* were really a good girl, Mab, but *I* was a perfect paragon." And Bess laughed wickedly.

"I have heard of some of your doings," said Dr. Stewart, "and I should judge from them that you were a paragon."

"Mab, you bad girl! you have been telling tales out of school!" exclaimed Bess, a faint blush stealing over her face as she thought: "Then Guy knows all those dreadful things. What must he think of me?"

Guy *did* know of *some* of "those dreadful things," but had his betrothed known that he admired the saucy school-girl daring her mind would have been greatly relieved.

The arrival just then at the depot, and the bustle of getting on the train and securing good

seats, or chairs, rather,—for they took the parlor-car,—drove all anxiety from her mind for the present; but it came back again, and I think her journey was not quite so pleasant for that one little thought.

Mabel, utterly unconscious of the evil she had wrought by her remarks, chatted away in a lively manner.

Dr. Stewart proved to be a most delightful travelling companion, for he bought books, nuts, and candy by the wholesale, utterly regardless of expense, until the girls began first to remonstrate, then to tease him.

"I know what he is angling after," said Mabel. "He is filling us up with sweetmeats to save the expense of buying a dinner."

"Not so, as I'll prove to you very soon," answered the doctor, with a majestic flourish of his book.

"Perhaps he is deluded into the idea that he is escorting Oliver Twists," observed Bess.

The doctor resented this accusation indignantly, and thus part of their long journey wore merrily away.

Nothing of any moment occurred except a delay of several hours at a little wayside station, and at six o'clock the next evening they steamed into Cincinnati.

"We have just two hours and a half to stay

here," said Dr. Stewart, as he signalled to a cabman standing near by. "Take us to one of the best hotels in the city," he ordered, as the man came up.

"All right, sir; I'll take you to the G—— House."

After a somewhat lengthy ride they drew up in front of a large, brilliantly-lighted hotel. Their driver assisted them to alight, directed them to the ladies' entrance, and, after promising to call for them promptly at a quarter-past eight, drove away.

Dr. Stewart rang the bell, and almost instantaneously the door was opened by an ebony bell-boy in a blue uniform.

"We want rooms and our supper," said the doctor, as they followed their guide up the thick-carpeted stairway.

"All night, sah?" inquired the boy, ushering them into the parlor.

"No; for about two hours."

"All right, sah." He disappeared, and in a few moments the clerk entered, and, with many bows and smiles in the direction of the girls, escorted them to a suite of rooms on the next floor.

"Supper will be served in twenty minutes," he said, as he bowed himself out.

"How very polite!" remarked Bess, laying off her hat and wraps.

"Can't you account for it?" asked the doctor from the other room.

"I can," answered Mabel. "If you had seen the glances he cast at Bess——"

"Now, Mab; he knew his glances wouldn't affect me any, so it was you he was looking at all the time."

"You seem to think that 'engaged' is branded on your forehead in letters of fire," said Mabel, in a lower tone. "Now don't look that way at me," she added, as Bess's face flushed and she looked at her friend half reproachfully. "I'm just ever so glad you are to be my sister." And, putting her arms around Bess, she kissed the crimson lips with sisterly affection. "I always thought I should be terribly jealous of you when you got engaged, and of Guy, too, but as long as you are engaged to each other I am entirely satisfied, and love you both more than ever, if such a thing were possible."

"Have done with that spooning," commanded the doctor's voice from the door-way. "You are worse than a pair of engaged lovers."

"Does it make you feel badly, papa?" asked Mabel.

"No, indeed, for I feel privileged to take the same liberty," answered her father. And, taking both girls in his arms, he bestowed a hearty kiss on each mouth.

"What if that clerk should appear now?" said Bess, as she nestled close in the doctor's arms, with a little homesick longing for her own dear father.

"He'd think——" began Mabel.

"Snpper ready," announced the smooth, courteous voice from the hall.

The girls would have dissolved partnership immediately, but the doctor held them tight, saying, with an arm around each, "All right, sir; lead on and we'll follow."

The clerk looked at them rather curiously, but longingly, as they followed him down-stairs to the dining-room. The rest of the time, after supper, was spent in the parlor in gay conversation, and promptly at the time mentioned their driver came, and they were driven to the depot.

"Now, girls, be extra careful, and be sure to send me a postal from Pittsburg," said Dr. Stewart, as he deposited his charges in the sleeping-car. "I will give you in charge of the conductor, and he will take care of you. Enjoy yourselves, and don't be uneasy about home, Mabel."

"She won't be uneasy," said saucy Bess. "A physician's family are never in danger; it's always the family that employ the physician."

The doctor attempted to scowl at the audacious young lady, and just then the bell rang for departure, so, hastily bidding the girls good-by, he

hurried from the car. The train began to move slowly, and in a few moments the girls were once more speeding on their way. Presently the porter came to make up their berth, and such fun as they had getting ready for bed. It was pitch-dark in the berth with the curtains drawn. Mabel bumped her head several times on the bottom of the upper berth, and once Bess nearly fell out in the aisle.

"It's a little like going to bed on a shelf," said Mabel, as she tucked herself under the covers.

"In a pretty dark cupboard, too," added Bess. "Draw that window-curtain up, Mab; that will give us some light. There,—that's better; now if we don't go to sleep we can amuse ourselves by looking out. I dearly love to travel in a sleeping-car, don't you?" she asked, a few moments later.

"Yes; but, goodness me! how that man snores!" answered Mabel.

"How do you know it's a man?"

"Because a woman could never snore in that manner," replied Mabel, as they both listened.

"Sounds like a steamboat," said Bess, beginning to laugh. "If he doesn't look out he'll raise the roof off the car."

"Bess," remonstrated Mabel, "do hush; you'll waken everybody around you."

"Do you possibly imagine that any one is asleep with that energetic nasal performer in their midst?"

demanded the incorrigible Bess, laughing harder than ever.

Her laugh was so infectious that Mabel could not help joining in, laughing so heartily that she had to stuff the counterpane in her mouth.

"Bess, do stop if you have any mercy," she at last managed to gasp out. But it was impossible to stop with the snoring still going on louder and louder every minute, and finally, to add to it all, a savage voice was heard from an adjacent berth, "Confound that man! Why don't he stop? Between him and those silly gigglers in that other section a respectable body can't get even a wink of sleep."

Of course this only acted as a fresh incentive to the "silly gigglers," and Bess, especially, laughed until Mabel was sure she would have the hysterics; but presently she lay so still that Mabel thought she was asleep, and, with a sigh of relief, she composed herself to follow Bess's example. But when morning came she found, to her great surprise, that Bess had not closed her eyes to sleep the whole night.

"What was the matter?" asked Mabel. "Were you sick? Why didn't you waken me?"

"Sick!" groaned Bess. "Sick is no name for it. I thought I should die before morning. Oh, if I was only out of here and on dry ground!"

"It is *too* bad," said Mabel, gazing sympatheti-

cally at her. "I wish I could do something for you; but if you feel like getting up, we had better begin to dress right away, for we will soon be at Pittsburg."

But it was easier to talk of dressing than to do it. The girls seemed to be all arms and legs; they got continually into each other's way, bumped their heads together and against the head of their berth, and every once in a while Bess, who felt so dizzy and faint that she could scarcely sit up, would lean her head wearily against the side of the car. And then, just as she had gathered courage enough to insert herself into her basque and Mabel was arranging her collar in the narrow panel mirror between the car-windows, whiz, they went into a tunnel. When they emerged once more into daylight the girls were staring at each other in comical surprise.

"Tunnel," said Bess.

"I'd forgotten all about them," said Mabel. "We'll have to look out for them all along the road now."

When they reached Pittsburg, where they stopped for breakfast, Bess was too sick to get out, so the porter of the sleeping-car very kindly brought them an inviting hot lunch. Mabel ate with the relish that travelling gives one, but Bess could only be induced to drink a few swallows of coffee. As the morning wore away she grew no

better, and seeing, as she herself said, that she was bound to have a day of it, she settled herself as comfortably as possible, with her head resting in a pile of soft shawls against the back of the seat, and gazed idly out of the window.

The grand old mountains, with their lofty, tree-crowned heights, extended far, far upwards, until it seemed almost as if you could stand on their summits and look over into heaven. The sun had been behind a cloud most of the morning, but as Bess watched it burst joyously forth from its hiding-place and poured its clear, bright rays upon the earth, bringing out in dazzling splendor all the varied autumnal tints of the trees. It is impossible to describe the beauty and magnificence of the scene.

Bess uttered an exclamation that caused Mabel, who was looking out the other side of the car, to turn quickly.

"How perfectly grand!" she exclaimed, after gazing silently for a few moments on the lovely panorama passing before her. "I think if Lyn could see this she would be convinced. It is none other than the work of a God."

As they left Cresson the porter came to the girls and said,—

"We will go over the horse-shoe bend shortly. Would the young ladies like to go out in the observation-car? You can see so much better there."

"Yes, indeed!" exclaimed Bess before Mabel could reply. "I wouldn't miss seeing that for anything; so lead the way and we'll follow."

"The young ladies had better carry some extra wraps along," said the porter again, "for they will find it much colder than they think."

Mabel reached for a couple of shawls, and the porter, relieving her of them, led the way through as many as five coaches, all of them sleepers, and finally they stood in the observation-car. It was a long, open car, with no seats except a few chairs, and Mabel found that she had done well to follow the porter's advice, for the mountain-air was cold as ice and keen and cutting as a knife.

Neither girl would accept the seats offered them by the porter, for both declared they wanted to get the best view possible. For quite a distance before they came to the bend the road wound in and out around the mountains like the letter W. It was impossible to keep track of the engine; it was first one side of the track and then the other, the long train of cars following it like a serpent, and at last they struck the bend.

It was a perfect horse-shoe. One could look away down below at the valley and then up at the high mountains that surrounded it.

The train went down-grade at almost lightning speed, and Bess and Mabel clung to the porter

for support, for the rate at which they were going almost took them off their feet.

At last they were fairly round to the end of the horse-shoe, and glad enough was Bess to get back into the sleeper again.

They made a stop of five minutes at Altoona for refreshments, and Mabel took this opportunity to write a postal to her father, giving it to a darky to mail for her.

Long before the train arrived at Harrisburg, where they had twenty minutes in which to get dinner, Mabel herself began to feel nauseated. Not a bite of dinner could she eat, and as the afternoon began to wane she began to feel rather hungry; but the sickening sensation increased, her head commenced to ache, and, on the whole, she felt decidedly miserable. Bess could offer her no consolation, for, if anything, she felt worse than did Mabel, and night fell on two most woful-looking young travellers.

The train was behind time and was going at about the rate of forty or fifty miles an hour. It swayed from side to side, rocking the passengers to and fro, and almost throwing them off their feet if they attempted to rise.

Mabel, feeling as if she would faint from nausea, had raised her window an inch or so, and, to add to her woes, one of the many flying cinders lodged in her eye. It was uncomfortable, to say

the least, and Mabel winked vigorously for a few minutes trying to get it out. But it was no use, —the cinder seemed bound to stay where it was,— and Mabel disconsolately held her handkerchief to the afflicted eye, with a long-drawn sigh of suffering and despair.

Every time the engine whistled it seemed to the poor girls that it surely must be for Baltimore; but no, the great iron monster appeared to be shrieking for nothing but increased speed, and it was a wonder already how the train managed to keep the track.

"Will they *never* stop?" thought Mabel, desperately, while Bess declared with a groan that it was an example of perpetual motion. But at last, to the unutterable relief of both girls, they arrived at Baltimore.

"Which is the best hotel here?" asked Mabel of the porter, as he swung them off the platform.

"I would advise you to go to the Bernum," he answered. And, wishing them good-by and a safe arrival at their final destination, he sprang on board the train, and it sped on its reckless way once more, leaving the girls standing alone on the platform looking at each other with something like dismay.

An omnibus was standing right across from them on the other side of the depot, and Bess in-

for support, for the rate at which they were going almost took them off their feet.

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An omnibus was standing right across from them on the other side of the depot, and Bess in-

quired of the driver if he would take them to the Bernum Hotel.

"This 'bus belongs to the Vermont Hotel," he answered. "We will do as well by you as the Bernum. The Vermont is the best hotel in the city; so suppose you try us. I think we can suit you."

Bess was too wretched to argue with him, so she entered the conveyance, followed by Mabel, and the driver went to look after their baggage.

There were three other passengers in the omnibus, two ladies and a gentleman, and our girls envied them their fresh, happy looks. After a short ride they drew up in front of a large, imposing-looking building. A flight of carpeted steps led upwards from the broad stone pavement. As the girls followed their guide up the steps to the hall, a scene of elegance met their eyes. I cannot describe it, but suffice to say that a palace could scarcely excel it in beauty and grandeur.

Our travellers were met at the door of the reception-room by a colored porter, and were ushered into that spacious apartment, where Bess asked if they could have supper served immediately in their room. The man bowed assent, and, with a grand flourish, escorted them to the elevator. The room assigned to their use was No. 32, on the second floor. It was furnished in fine style, and

Bess dropped with a sigh of relief on the soft, crimson-cushioned lounge.

"Have a fire, ladies?" inquired the porter's voice at the door.

"Certainly," said Bess, wondering if the man thought they were fond of sitting in a cold room. "And supper immediately," she added, as he started away.

In a few moments a small colored boy came and made a fire in the wide grate. He performed his mission silently, and withdrew without saying a word.

After ridding themselves of the dust and dirt of travel, the girls felt somewhat better, and sat down to await the arrival of supper. But ten, fifteen, twenty minutes passed and no supper came. Bess looked uneasily towards the bell-cord.

"I wouldn't ring," said Mabel. "He'll be here presently."

So they waited another ten minutes, but no waiter made his appearance, and, opening the door, Mabel looked out into the hall. Not a soul was in sight. She reported the fact to Bess, and that young lady pulled the bell-cord vigorously. Again and again did she ring, but no one came to answer the call.

"What ails them?" exclaimed Mabel, at last, thoroughly out of patience. "If it were midnight I should not wonder at their delay, or whatever

you might call it, but as it isn't quite eight o'clock——"

"They might at least answer our ring if they don't intend to bring any supper," interrupted Bess, warmly. "To be sure, it is Sunday night, but people eat on Sunday as well as any other day."

"I'd never advise any one to come to this hotel," said Mabel, after she had even ventured to ring the hall-bell, but without satisfactory results.

"I wish we had minded the porter, and gone to the Bernum," added Bess. "We surely could not have fared any worse than we have here."

The girls waited impatiently until almost ten o'clock, and then, seeing it was of no use to wait any longer, locked their door and went to bed, very much disgusted with themselves and the Vermont Hotel in general.

The next morning, just as Bess had finished dressing, there came a knock at the door. She opened it, and discovered a very polite-looking clerk standing outside.

"Do you ladies wish breakfast?" he asked, with a deep bow and most suave smile.

"Yes, sir," answered Bess, emphatically; then she added, with dignity, "We would have been quite pleased to have had supper. A waiter took our order, but he, unfortunately, forgot to fill it,

and it was impossible to even get an answer to our ring."

The polite clerk immediately began to make the most humble apologies, but Bess stopped him with a grand wave of her hand. "No apologies are necessary, sir. The outrageousness of the insult speaks plainly enough for itself without being brought into bolder relief by excuses."

She bowed very politely, and made a motion as if to close the door. The clerk stared at her in dismay, confusion, and surprise for about a second, and then walked abruptly away.

Mabel was soon ready, and they descended to the first floor. The elevator-boy on being questioned as to the whereabouts of the dining-room, pointed towards a long, dark corridor, and said "There," in a tone of languid indifference. The girls started down the narrow hall, Mabel laughing heartily at the comical side of the affair, and without much difficulty the dining-room was reached. It was not the breakfast hour, so Bess and Mabel and a gentleman were the only ones to be served.

The bill of fare was a study. On one side was the menu; on the other, the page was divided into three columns, one wide and two smaller ones. The one on the left was headed "Portions."

The girls were trying to get the "hang" of it, as Bess said, when a gentlemanly-looking waiter

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The polite clerk immediately began to make the most humble apologies, but Bess stopped him with a grand wave of her hand. "No apologies are necessary, sir. The outrageousness of the insult speaks plainly enough for itself without being brought into bolder relief by excuses."

She bowed very politely, and made a motion as if to close the door. The clerk stared at her in dismay, confusion, and surprise for about a second, and then walked abruptly away.

Mabel was soon ready, and they descended to the first floor. The elevator-boy on being questioned as to the whereabouts of the dining-room, pointed towards a long, dark corridor, and said "There," in a tone of languid indifference. The girls started down the narrow hall, Mabel laughing heartily at the comical side of the affair, and without much difficulty the dining-room was reached. It was not the breakfast hour, so Bess and Mabel and a gentleman were the only ones to be served.

The bill of fare was a study. On one side was the menu; on the other, the page was divided into three columns, one wide and two smaller ones. The one on the left was headed "Portions."

The girls were trying to get the "hang" of it, as Bess said, when a gentlemanly-looking waiter

came up and volunteered information. The wide column was for the articles of food desired, and the "portion" column was for the number of portions wanted: two, three, or four, as the case might be. So Bess, feeling much enlightened, proceeded to write down "coffee," "eggs," "beefsteak," and "biscuits," placing the figure 2 opposite each in the "portion" column.

The waiter looked from one to the other of the girls with a queer expression of countenance as he read it, and then hurried away. He came back a few moments after, and kindly informed the girls that two portions would be entirely too much for them, and he had taken the liberty of changing it to one.

Both thanked him for his kindness, and when their breakfast was placed before them they saw the wisdom of the change, for they were served with enough of each article to supply four hungry men with moderate appetites.

But the climax of absurdity was reached when our travellers called at the desk for their bill. The proprietor might just as well have been carved from stone for all the mobility he expressed. When Bess asked for the bill he turned slowly around, took it from his desk, and handed it to her precisely as an automaton would have done. Not a muscle of his face moved; he did not even deign to look at the girls.

As Bess cast her eyes down the page before her she held her breath in astonishment. The items were these:

Room	——
Fire	——
Breakfast	——
Transit to and from depot . . .	——
	——
Total	$6.85

She looked up at the statue before her in unfeigned surprise, but he did not appear to notice her, and so, without a word, Bess paid the amount stipulated, and walked out of the office in as dignified a manner as she could assume.

But when they were in the omnibus on their way to the depot, she lay back and laughed until she could laugh no longer. They reached Frederick City without any further adventures, but to this day neither girl can ever think of their Eastern trip without smiling over the remembrance of the night they spent at the Vermont Hotel.

CHAPTER XXI.

A WEDDING.

On a pleasant, balmy morning the next May a merry little party were seated in the palace-car of a north-bound train. They were Mrs. Stewart, Mabel, and Lilly, *en route* for Union City, to attend the wedding of the Rev. Mr. Blackmore and Amy Grahame.

Lilly was to be one of the bridesmaids, and her joy knew no bounds. She was chattering away at quite a lively rate about the dress she was going to wear and as to the probable arrangement of her yellow tresses. Mabel was reading. She was right in the midst of an interesting love-story, —where the heroine was on the eve of deciding the momentous question as to which of her two lovers she should accept.

Mabel was not particularly fond of love-stories in general, but this one was uncommonly good, something out of the usual line of sentimental gush and nonsense, and Mabel was trying her best to follow the thread of the story, but somehow Lilly's words got mixed up with those she was reading, and Mabel closed the volume impatiently.

"Lil, do keep quiet!" she exclaimed, "or else the conductor will think you are a parrot and put you in the baggage-car. They don't allow animals of any kind in the passenger-coaches."

"Parrots ain't animals," answered Lilly, pursing up her mouth. "And that puts me in mind; I've got a conundrum for you. Why are parrots like some watches?"

Lilly was lately developing an alarming propensity for composing conundrums, and Ed had jocularly remarked that she would make a first-class almanac if she kept on.

Her riddles were always a source of amusement for her family, the more so as they were all intensely original, and now as she propounded this one Mrs. Stewart turned from her window with an expectant smile.

"Why are parrots like some watches?" asked Lilly again, seeing that Mabel hesitated.

"I'm sure I don't know. Why are they?"

"'Cause they're repeaters," answered Lilly, triumphantly.

Mabel turned and looked out of her window with an amused face, and Mrs. Stewart asked,—

"Where did you get that one, Lilly?"

"Nowhere," answered Lilly, with a shrug of her shoulders. "I made it up myself. I'll ask you another one directly."

At this a fat old gentleman, who sat across the

aisle from our party, and who had listened to the little conversation, spoke to Lilly and invited her to come and sit with him awhile, which she shyly consented to do, and Mabel, glad of the reprieve, turned again to her book. In about half an hour Lilly came back looking quite excited, and the old gentleman disappeared to the farther end of the car.

"Oh, mamma!" she cried, "what do you think? He told me he was going South in a few days, and if I would give him my name and address he would send me a real parrot. And when I told him I was Dr. Stewart's daughter he said that he used to know papa. They were little boys together, and papa was his dearest friend when they were young men. His name is Raymond."

Of course this announcement created quite a surprise with Mrs. Stewart and Mabel, and when the old gentleman came back presently and introduced himself, the former lady, to her still greater surprise, found him to be an old schoolmate of her own childhood also.

Of course the long, tedious journey passed away quite pleasantly after that, and our travellers were much surprised when they arrived at Union. Morton was there to meet them, and in a very short time they were at the parsonage. Lilly fell in love with the place at once, and declared it the cosiest little house she had ever seen.

The wedding was not to take place until the next morning at ten o'clock. The Rev. Mr. Grahame was to tie the nuptial knot. Amy's three little sisters and Lilly, together with the young male cousins of the bride-elect, were to be the attendants.

Bright and early the next morning everybody was up and bestirring themselves at both Grahame homesteads, and at nine o'clock the spacious parlors of Amy's home commenced filling with the *élite* of Union, for this was to be the grandest wedding that had ever been witnessed in that aristocratic village.

Promptly at the hour named for the ceremony the strains of the wedding-march were heard, and the bridal party entered. Amy had always been handsome, but now she was superbly lovely in her wedding-costume of heavy white satin, with a most elegant court train. It was embroidered in a beautiful design, with tiny, shimmering pearls, and the elegant veil, held in place by a bunch of orange-blossoms, was of the richest Brussels lace. The ornaments were diamonds. The groom wore the conventional black suit, and looked supremely happy and noble. The bridesmaids were like little fairies in their fleecy-white dresses and flowing hair, and the miniature groomsmen behaved themselves admirably. Bess was charming in her robe of wine-colored silk, with square train, under-

neath which was a ruching of real point-lace. Her ornaments were garnets, forming a fine contrast to the dusky skin, against which they glittered and twinkled like fiery stars. Mabel wore a costume of pale blue, and Morton cast more than one admiring glance at the bewitching blonde by his side.

Iolanthe was there, and looked really radiant in her costume of pink-and-white mull, with pearl ornaments. Ferdinand seemed completely fascinated by her, and ventured scarcely a foot away from her vicinity the whole morning.

The ceremony and the sumptuous repast that followed it were alike impressive, and the young couple started off on their bridal tour amid showers of well-wishes and rice. They were to spend the honeymoon in Florida and then return to Shalmar, quite a large city sixteen miles from Union, where the groom's present charge was situated.

The wedding was the nine-days' talk of the town, and then, like all other weddings and society events, it subsided into the background to give place to something else not quite so old-fashioned.

The Stewarts returned to St. Louis after a week's short visit, and settled down to the routine of home-life once more. Mabel was seized with a sudden desire to become independent, and with-

out much difficulty got up a class of music-scholars, to whom she attended faithfully, giving such satisfaction all round that their parents declared no one but Miss Stewart should ever teach them.

Meanwhile, dear old Mrs. Montford passed quietly away to her long, last rest, and Bess turned housekeeper for her father, performing the arduous duties of a minister's wife and daughter with a zeal well worthy of the highest commendation.

And so we leave them,—Bess and Mabel,—each in her own sphere of usefulness and love. Some time in the future we may perhaps renew their acquaintance; whether or not depends upon the number and sincerity of the friends they make upon this their début on the world's great stage.

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